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Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

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The Throat Singers of Tuva

Keith Flynn

Stupefied
And rolling down
The steep raves
I write
The Constitution
Of no authority
The history
Of ecstasy
Like the waves
Endlessly battered
Buttressed
From behind
By formlessness
And ahead
The only
Jagged choice
Is to carve
Themselves
Against the rock
And in doing so
Shape their
Opposite
Into the shore
And to speak
Of this woe
In thunderous
Tones
Like the blind
Throat singers
Their voicebox
Three notes
Locked between
Siberia and
The Gobi Desert
Breathing out
Rhomboids
And rain dances
Like turtledoves
In a drought
Making misty
The wobbly triangle
Of overwhelming
Fragrances
Coming from
The hidden source
No reference
To the Captain
No map
To chart
The ascent
More native
Than the Indian
More Indian
Than the sea

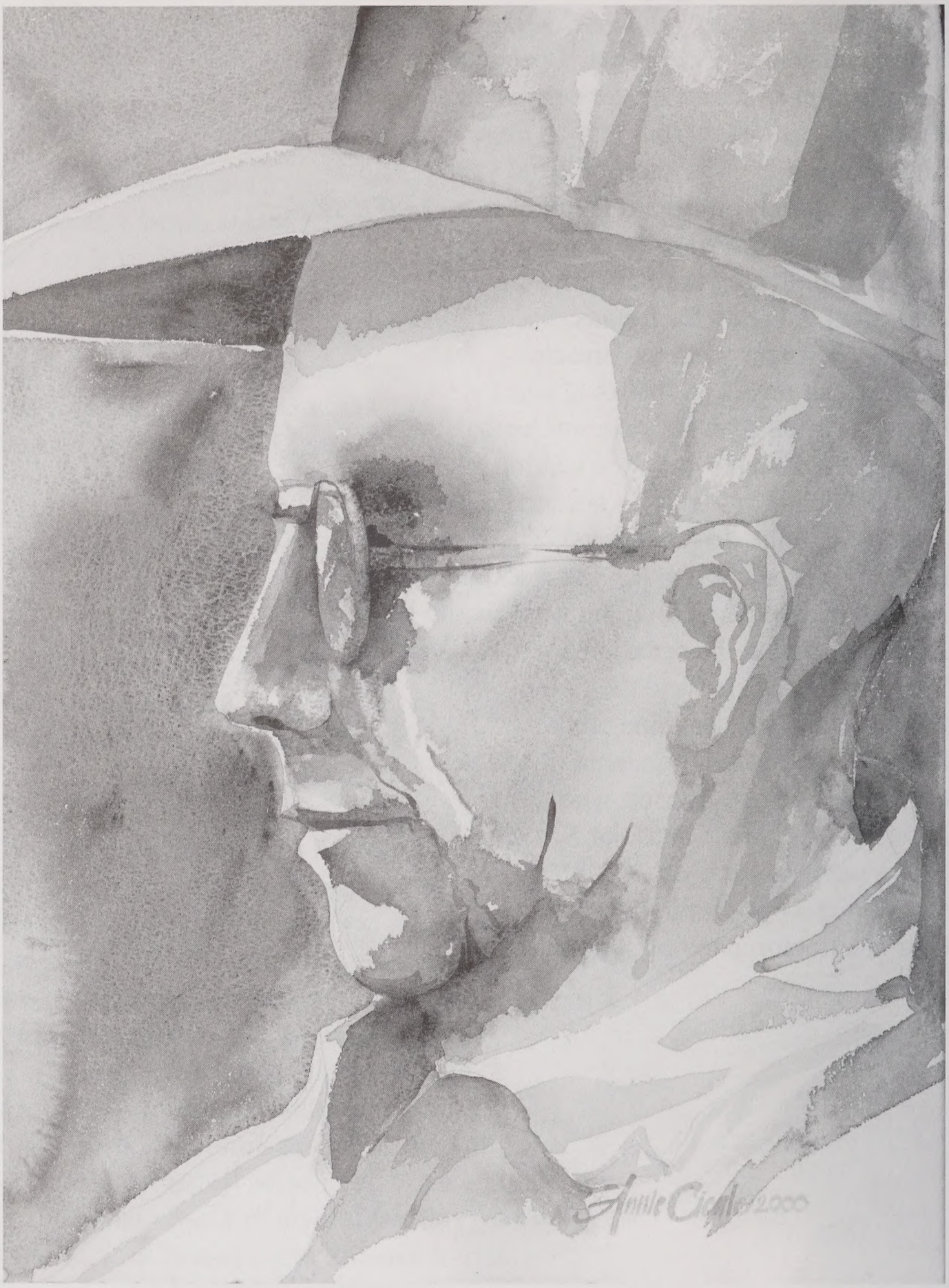
Left Behind

Keith Flynn

12-24-99

This jejune Jesuit and myself,
Pure joist, a beam balanced beneath
Our bottle of Scotch, warm in my throat
As we share conversation and a limo
From LaGuardia to the snowy West Side.
God is barely alive, he confesses,
And time is short, but Scotch is
Better than Port. I don't know,
I answer, I'm a whisky man myself,
But if forced to simile I would state
Unequivocally that God is a tractor
And the rapture a myth in the way
Of his corn. Yes, he says, Jesus
Was to mortal woman born,
Homeless and naked as a thief,
Stealing what little warmth the animals
Provided. I'm divided, I admit,
Staring behind the joint that I've lit
Through the smoke to the harbor
And its horn, ramming Manhattan with snow.
Those that read the Bible know, my friend
Continues, that the signposts point
Toward a glorious end, earthquakes and
Hurricanes, pestilence, the Earth a shrike
Of a house, waiting to explode. Ah but
Not before he calls the faithful home,
Right? I ask. Not until, the minister gloats,
Not until the earthly vessels float to meet
The King on high. I'm nigh to floating
As well, with twenty more minutes to ride,
Trapped in a limo with a minister
From Memphis and feeling left behind.
The poor are easy targets, I decide,
For they will never ride in chariots

Or drink cognac from a golden chalice;
So to pray for the mighty to fall
Is, all in all, their only defense. I sense
In my companion a rumbling, a personal
Recollection from one of the prominent
People he has known, but instead he moans,
Light-headed from my second hand smoke,
And says simply; the devil is no joke.
Well what's the devil to do at the century's
End, except to sing the scarecrow blues
And trawl the alley for friends.
I'll pray for your soul, the preacher
Replies, but this is my building and I
Must say good-bye. He gave my hand
A long warm shake and then waiting
For the silence to break; I knocked on the
Window and the driver stopped. The Jesuit
Rocked, then stumbled, leaving tracks in the snow,
And I wondered how long the wind would blow,
And I realized at the same time
That I'd been stiffed and the fare
From the airport was mine alone.
I laughed and toked, pondered my Xmas
Gift, serenaded by a Jesuit who
Needed a lift, a half-bottle of Scotch
And a warning for a tip. The black
Car ripped a trail through the lights.
God is a tractor, plowing long into the night.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Happiness

Keith Flynn

Happiness is
A matter
Of luck,
Perhaps effete,
Fraught with
Mechanical
Holy hazards
And unequivocal
Visions, hunched
And holding
Their head
To the side
As if insulted
That you came
This way
So far so fast,
Fueled by
Ignorance,
And they
Offer this
Teary theory:
No one
Pleased
Knows when
His hour
May come,
Crickets
Sizzling
Happily.

Elvis and the Moon

Will Hooper

The preacher was about one-third of the way into his sermon when I decided to slip out the front door. It had been another steamy summer day, and the little Baptist church still held the heat within its walls. Most of the women had made fans of their Sunday morning bulletins and were stirring up quite a breeze where I was sitting. I knew the sun was setting, and I felt a great thirst for those final rays.

I stepped out into the churchyard and watched the sunset. Beyond the lake past the gravel dirt road, the sun beamed between trees like a glowing red ember that had been thrown into the midst of the forest. The grass was still wet from a thunderstorm that had passed through a few hours earlier, and the air was cooler than I expected, but not as cool as I would've liked.

I felt sudden relief in the evening air as I realized that I could stay outside as long as I wished and therefore would not have to stand and sing (or stand and not sing) the benediction hymn, nor would I have to stand with my eyes closed while Preacher Calvert reeled off one of his ten-minute marathon "End of Service" prayers. I knew the prayers weren't really that long. But quite often it seemed he had more to say in that last prayer than he had said in his entire sermon.

Something seemed terribly oppressive about Preacher Calvert's Sunday night services. In fact, his sermons seemed to follow the mood of the time of day in which they were conceived. On Sunday morning, everything was bright and new. There was a fresh beginning for everyone, and Jesus loved us all, without exception. Even the lowliest criminals were just a prayer away from forgiveness and acceptance. God was good, as was the world he created and maintained for us.

But by Sunday night, boy! Had things fallen downhill. The end of the world was in sight and God was getting ready to cast judgment on his poor little wretched adversaries. I could just see all those fear-filled faces: Hitler, Caesar, Stalin, secular humanists of all breeds, my second-grade school teacher (I liked to think); all of them weeping and gnashing their teeth as God rained plagues down on them with no hope of relief. God, what a dismal world that day had sunk into by nightfall.

I used to imagine that Preacher Calvert, for some reason, always experienced some depressing event on Sunday afternoons. Or perhaps, as the end of day approached, he would think of all the wrongs that had been

done to him in his life and take solace in the vision of God showering vengeance upon those who had brought pain into his otherwise peaceful existence.

Then there were those hymns. They would tell me what a pathetic and sinful slob I was and how I should double over in guilt at the altar, offering my pitiful pleas for forgiveness and begging for God's mercy.

When I was eight years old, I believed the hymns and the sermons. But as I approached the summer of 1975, my fourteenth, I started thinking that perhaps I wasn't really all that bad a guy. And I began to let some of the guilt slip away, at least the guilt that resided on the surface of my being. As this new self-respect slowly crystallized within me, I grew more impatient with what I was being told to believe about myself and found it increasingly difficult to listen to Preacher Calvert's Sunday-night sermons. So I developed a habit of taking strolls around the churchyard after Bible study.

On this particular evening, a full moon was rising in the east and the sky still held a few random white chunks of cloud left in the wake of the storm. Some of the clouds spanned that part of the sky where they were reddened by the remaining rays of the sun. The big white moon sat surrounded by darker clouds that still trembled with lightning, while a stark blue sky circled the moon like a barrier protecting it from those deadly clouds. When the moon was that big and white, it reminded me of one of my mother's buttermilk biscuits, like the ones we'd had that day for dinner, only the moon was a lot whiter.

In search of a better view of the moon, I stepped around to the eastern side of the church. Upon reaching my favorite Sunday-night hiding spot, a set of concrete steps that lead up to a side entrance into the church, I found my seat was already occupied by five-year-old Dennis Stroud. He and his mother had been coming to our church for six months. His father, Ronald, never came; but his mother always requested prayer for Ronald on Sunday mornings. Everybody knew Ronald was an alcoholic. I figured he didn't come to church for that reason. If a fairly well-behaved fourteen-year-old like me could be made to feel guilty as sin, I could just imagine how bad it would be for a person with a bona fide sin like alcoholism.

I guess, in a way, Dennis and I had that in common. Because my father was an alcoholic too. He only did it part-time, though. He'd take long breaks from his alcoholism to be responsible for a while. Then, when he'd start to think about things, like that he was married, or that he wasn't too young anymore, he'd start drinking again. While he was drinking, he wouldn't come to church, because he said that the Bible clearly states that

hypocrites make God sick to his stomach, and our church already had enough hypocrites in it to make God puke. So he didn't want to add to the problem. From my own father's tendencies, and the fact that Ronald never came to church, I figured that Ronald was probably always drunk.

"Hey, Denny," (he preferred to be called Denny). "What're you doin' out here?"

"I told Mama I was goin' to the bathroom. But I didn't wanta go back in."

I knew how he felt. I walked up the steps and sat down on the cool concrete beside him. "See you found my favorite sittin' spot. Nice view from here, ain't it?"

"Yeah. I was just lookin' at those clouds. There's still lightnin' in 'em."

I looked at the distant orange-red clouds, as silent sheets of light flickered and flashed within them. They still held a bold and dangerous appearance, as the white, red and dark parts of them were very well defined and separated. I imagined that, somewhere east of us, and under those clouds, someone was at that moment experiencing the very same storm, and we could see how pretty it was now that we weren't covered in rain and wind.

"What is lightnin' anyway? Mama says she don't really know what it is, but that she always heard it's the lightnin' that hurts things, not the thunder. She thinks it's like fire in the sky."

Kids were always asking me questions like this. I think I must have seemed like someone who knew about scientific things. And if I didn't know, I could usually come up with something that sounded pretty good. Actually, I had read some scientific books, and I liked to read the encyclopedia from time to time. So I could usually come up with an answer that had some semblance of truth in it.

"Well, Denny, I think it has something to do with electricity. You heard that story 'bout how Benjamin Franklin got shocked while he was flyin' a kite in a thunderstorm, didn't you?" He nodded yes. "Well, I think what happens is that, during the day, all the heat causes the clouds to spin around and rub up against each other. And the friction o' them clouds rubbin' together is what causes all 'at electricity. You know, like when you walk across carpet on the floor, and then you get shocked. That's 'cause of the friction between your shoes and the carpet."

"Oh," he said, in a way that I could tell he didn't quite understand my explanation. "Well, what is electricity? I got shocked one time and it felt like I was being shook around inside."

I could see this was going to be one of those conversations that one gets into with kids sometimes. Every time you explain something, they take it one step further by asking you to explain your explanation. I figured it was preferable to what was going on inside the church.

"Uh, well, that's kind of a complicated subject, Denny. It has to do with electrons." I said "electrons" in a slow and intimidating way, wrinkling my brow slightly, hoping to scare him onto another subject, because I really didn't know that much about electrons. It didn't work.

"Oh yeah; we learned about electrons in science class at school. They go around an atom, right?"

"Yeah, right; so you already know about electrons. So I won't explain 'em to you."

"But they're supposed to be real small, so small you can't see 'em. How can they cause all 'at lightnin' like 'at?"

"Well, Denny, ya see, everything that there is in the world has a whole lotta atoms in it, and so everything also has a whole lotta electrons. Now when you got that many electrons floatin' around, somethin' big and terrible is bound to happen."

"Oh,'"he said, seeming a little more comfortable with my explanation this time.

We sat quietly for a few minutes. The sun had gone completely down during our conversation, and the previously red clouds had become a dull gray. Storm clouds still flashed silently in the eastern distance. As the clouds became less interesting to look at, the moon, which had risen significantly above them by now, had increased in intensity.

"What is the moon made of, James?"

I had just read an article about the moon a few days before, so I felt more confident on our new subject. "The moon is what they call a satellite. That means it goes around the Earth, just like an electron goes around an atom. It's just a buncha rock. You know, like they brought back on them Apollo missions."

"How old is it?"

"Oh, I was readin' the other day that it's about as old as the Earth is. 'Bout three or four billion years."

"How much is a billion?"

"A billion is a thousand times a million. So it's been here a heck of a long time. Longer than me or you have, for sure."

"Has it been here longer than my mama and daddy?"

"Yes, it has."

"Has it been here longer than President Ford?"

"Yes, Denny; it's been here a lot longer than that."

Denny seemed surprised at the idea that something could have been around longer than an old person like President Ford. Then he started to grin, as though he were challenged to come up with someone older than the moon.

"What about Jesus? It couldn't have been here before Jesus, could it?"

"Of course it was, Denny. Don't you remember that part of the Bible where Jesus talks about the moon turning red in the last days 'n all? How could he'a talked about the moon like 'at if it wasn't around? Nobody would'a known what the heck he was talkin' about."

"Oh yeah, 'at's right."

Then this deadly serious look came across Denny's face, as though he were about to ask the most profound and blasphemous question of his life.

"Is it older than.....E...l...v...i...s?" drawing "Elvis" out slowly, almost whispering the question.

"Yes, Denny; it's even older than Elvis."

Denny slowly turned his head toward the moon. His eyes filled with amazement and wonder. I could see he was experiencing the same feeling I felt when I first realized that there was something that had been around so long that I haven't the ability to imagine how old it is; no benchmarks old enough to measure by. So I just accept, in amazement, that it exists in the present, and that it has always been, and always will be here.

We sat there awhile, both of us thinking about time. Denny was thinking about the age of the moon, and I was thinking about the fact that I could remember when one of the last few Elvis movies came out. It was kind of depressing.

Denny began to shift around a little; I could feel another question coming on. "I wonder why God makes things like 'at."

"Things like what?"

"Things like the moon. It's just a big bunch of rocks in the sky, ain't it?"

"Yeah, as far as I know it is. Though God, he may have some purpose for it that we don't know about. Or maybe he just wants to give us something to study, seein' as how he made us the studyin' kind, you know."

"But why would he give us something and then not tell us about it, but just make us try and figure it out? Ain't that mean?"

"Well, Denny, one time I heard this sayin'. It went somethin' like life is a candle, and the dream gives it flame; you understand that?"

His five-year-old face looked as thoughtful as it possibly could for a moment. Then he carefully said, "You mean that people like to study things they don't know about, even if God already knows about them?"

"Yeah, sure. Don't you like to look around and figure things out sometimes? Like when you're playin' outside. You see somethin' strange and you try and figure it out."

"You mean like the other day when I was tryin' to see what was inside of a bird nest in a tree in our frontyard?"

"Yeah. Only adults like to figure out harder stuff than that. Like the moon, or electrons, or somethin'."

"Oh." He sat quiet for a moment. "Is that what scientists do?"

"Yeah, that's it. They just try 'n figure out why things are the way they are."

We sat quiet again for a little while. Away from the bright light of the moon, a few stars became visible. The ground was enmeshed by a sporadic network of firefly light, their quiet and illuminated messages slowly sparkling in a chaotic and graceful dance several feet above the ground. A bat was frantically chasing moths around the silvery white night light across the gravel parking lot.

Denny got restless. He got up and walked down the steps. He looked down for a moment at the gravel beneath his feet, then reached down and picked up a handful of rocks. He studied them a moment, rolling them around in his palm. He looked at the different colors, shapes, and sizes: brown dirt, mixed silver, gray and white granite, smoky quartz, and tiny pebbles so small their colors couldn't be distinguished. Then he looked up at the moon. "Just a buncha rocks?" he asked.

"Yeah. But that don't mean there's nothin' to it, though." I affirmed. "Why, you'd be surprised at the things you can figure out from rocks." Denny looked down at his handful of rocks again. "People who study rocks—geologists, they're called—they can figure out by testin' them rocks what they're made of, how old they are, and how they got made that way. And from that, they can tell how old the Earth is and how it got here. Yeah, there's a lot of things you can learn from rocks."

Denny looked perplexed for a moment. "You said the world was four billion years old. Is 'at older than six thousand years?"

"Yep."

"My mama told me that the world is six thousand years old 'cause 'at's how old the Bible says it is."

I felt on shaky ground right then. So I figured I'd better be either very tactful, or completely incomprehensible. "Well, I guess if God can know four billion years, he can know six thousand. It's all too long for me to know anyway." Denny looked confused, which was good because I realized that I was telling Denny things better left unsaid around our church.

Denny shook off the perplexed look and replaced it with a mischievous one. "Hey, watch this, James!" He ran underneath the night light and began to throw the rocks from his hand, one at a time, in front of the bat. The bat flipped around and flew jerkily towards Denny's decoys, being misled from its true course to chase phantom insects. After Denny emptied his hand of rocks, he got bored and stepped back across the parking lot and up the steps to sit down beside me again.

Then they came out. They had all heard the Word of God and were ready to face another three days in the world, until Wednesday night called them back to the Word once again.

"There you are!" said Denny's mother, Grace Stroud, as she rounded the corner of the church and headed down the sidewalk toward the steps beneath us. "You know, I was beginnin' to wonder where you got to."

I figured that I should speak up. "He's been here the whole time, Mrs. Stroud. He hasn't been in any trouble at all."

"Well, I don't like him runnin' out on church like that. Like to keep 'm in my sight. But thank you, James, for lookin' out for him. C'mon, now, Denny; we gotta get home. Say bye to James."

"Bye, James; talk to ya later." Denny jumped off the steps—they weren't too high—and ran after his mother as she walked toward their car.

"See ya, Denny." I saw my mother coming toward me. She was becoming a little worried with my new habit of stepping out of church during the sermon. The people who usually did this were those men in the church who smoked, sneaking out to have a cigarette. She was beginning to wonder if I had developed some sort of smoking habit.

"What are you doin' out here, boy?" she said, trying to fill her face with a disciplinary look, but accomplishing only a look of motherly worry instead.

"Oh, nothin'. Me 'n Denny were just talkin'. It was gettin' too hot inside the church for both of us."

I got up and accompanied her across the parking lot toward the car.

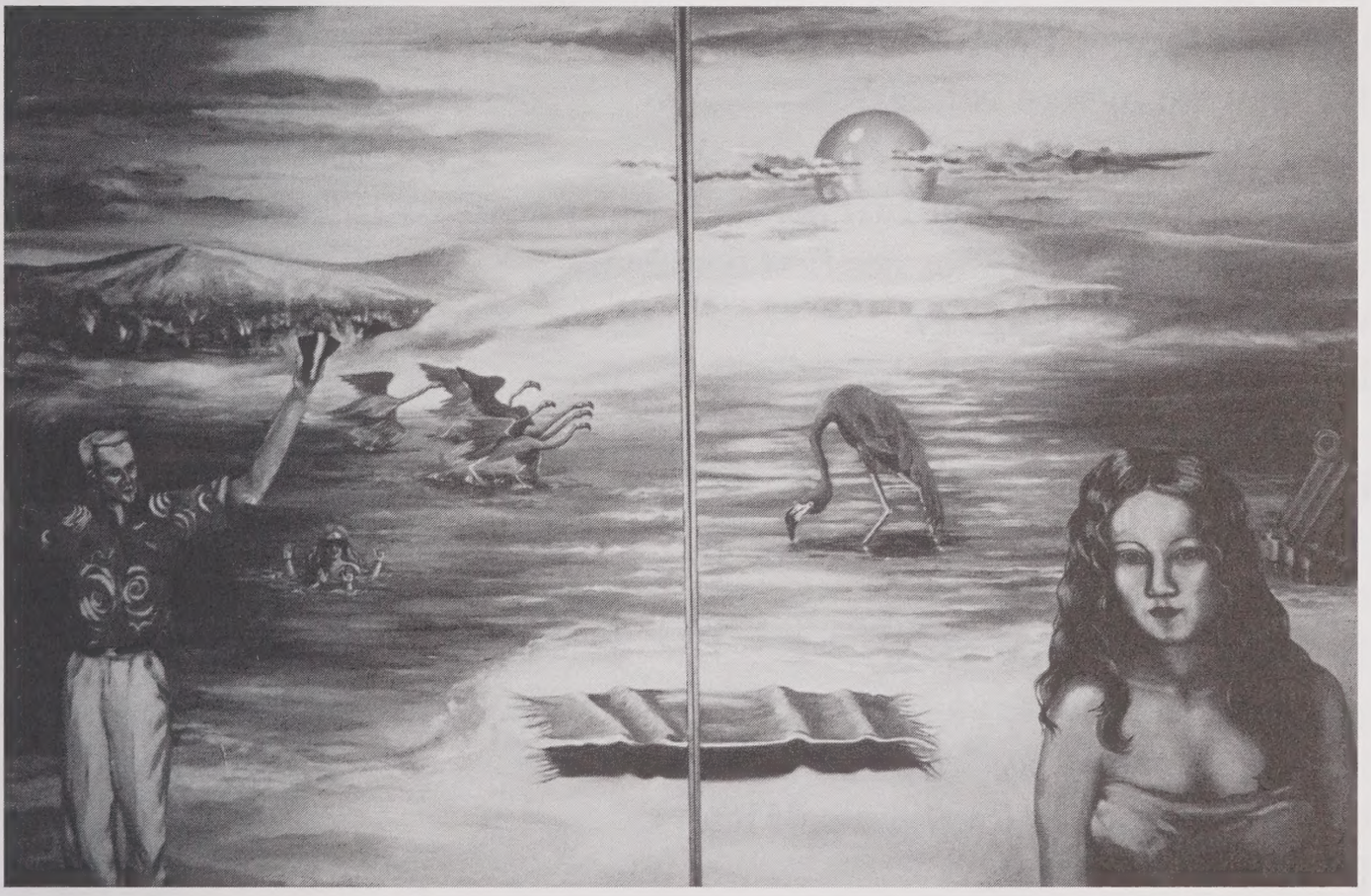
"Talkin' 'bout what?"

"Oh, you know; the moon, lightnin', stuff like 'at. He was askin' me kid questions. Though some of 'em I couldn't answer too good."

"I remember you askin' me questions I couldn't answer too good either," she said amidst a little laugh.

Preacher Calvert was shaking hands at the doorway of the church as the congregation came out. As I looked toward the entrance he waved goodbye and I returned the gesture. I glanced up and saw the white church steeple in the silver light pointing up like a sign post towards the stars.

We both got in the car. As we pulled out of the driveway, I could hear the gravel spraying up under the car, some rocks being thrown away while others were driven ever more firmly into the ground.



The Seventh Day
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

Firstborn

Will Hooper

I saw Mama puttin' away
the boxed pictures last night,
but not before she'd looked
at 'em awhile.
I knew which pictures
she was lookin' at—
though I couldn't see
'em myself—
'cause she had the same
look on her face
that she had
when the picture was taken—
that was June 7, 1954—
I'd seen the picture before.
It's a black and white of
Mama holdin' Gary, her first son—
I'm her second son after her first daughter—
we both came after Gary.
In the picture Mama's holdin' Gary
and not smilin' but just
lookin' down at him.
And he ain't lookin' at her 'cause
he's dead.
He was 'bout 24 hours old
when the picture was taken,
if you can call it 'at, 'cause
he'd been dead for 23 and a half hours.
But Mama said she'd
wanted some pictures of him
before they buried him.
So now she's got all these pictures
in 'at yellowed ol' box
that's taped up and in
the den closet most times.
They're different pictures of Mama
holdin' Gary on Grandpa and Grandma's porch—

her lookin' at the camera
and not smilin'—
another her lookin' down at Gary,
another over her shoulder where
you can see Gary's face and
he's wrapped in a white blanket,
and him not smilin'
and his eyes are closed—
but you know he ain't asleep.

One time I asked Mama
why she wanted those pictures
and she said she didn't
wanta forget her firstborn—
but then she said she also
didn't wanta forget how
God punishes fornicators
'cause if God punishes you hard
you'd better remember it.
And I asked her what fornicators are
and she said it's people who have
to do somethin' they ain't ready for.

Sometimes when Daddy's been drinkin'
and is gone somewhere or just asleep
in the bedroom,
she winds up in the den by herself
and lookin' at those pictures again
and sometimes I hear her cryin'
while she's lookin'—
I know she's there
though I don't bother her.

Uncle Julius

Will Hooper

I remember Julius's pipe,
but that ain't the main thing—
And when he sucked in a draw
of singed apple and cherry,
the cup of tobacco
lit up heat red—
and smoke rose slow
to the ceiling like a
flower of cloud
where it convened and conspired
with the dying sunlit dust.

And his smooth and gray
soft wool coat
Decorated with his
Vitalis smell
and brown elbow pads
and five hidden pockets.
I wore it and
I felt like a 45-year-old man too—
and I was proud.

And the watches
and Zippo lighters
in his jewelry store.
And him with
that convex bulb glass eye
peering down into the
miniature world
of ticking mechanical mysteries—
cleansing and curing
diseases of the cogs and springs—
and he'd sit utterly still and hover
over his timeless patient
with minute tweezers
like he too was stopped in time

until again the spring twisted
and the cog clicked.
But that ain't the biggest thing.

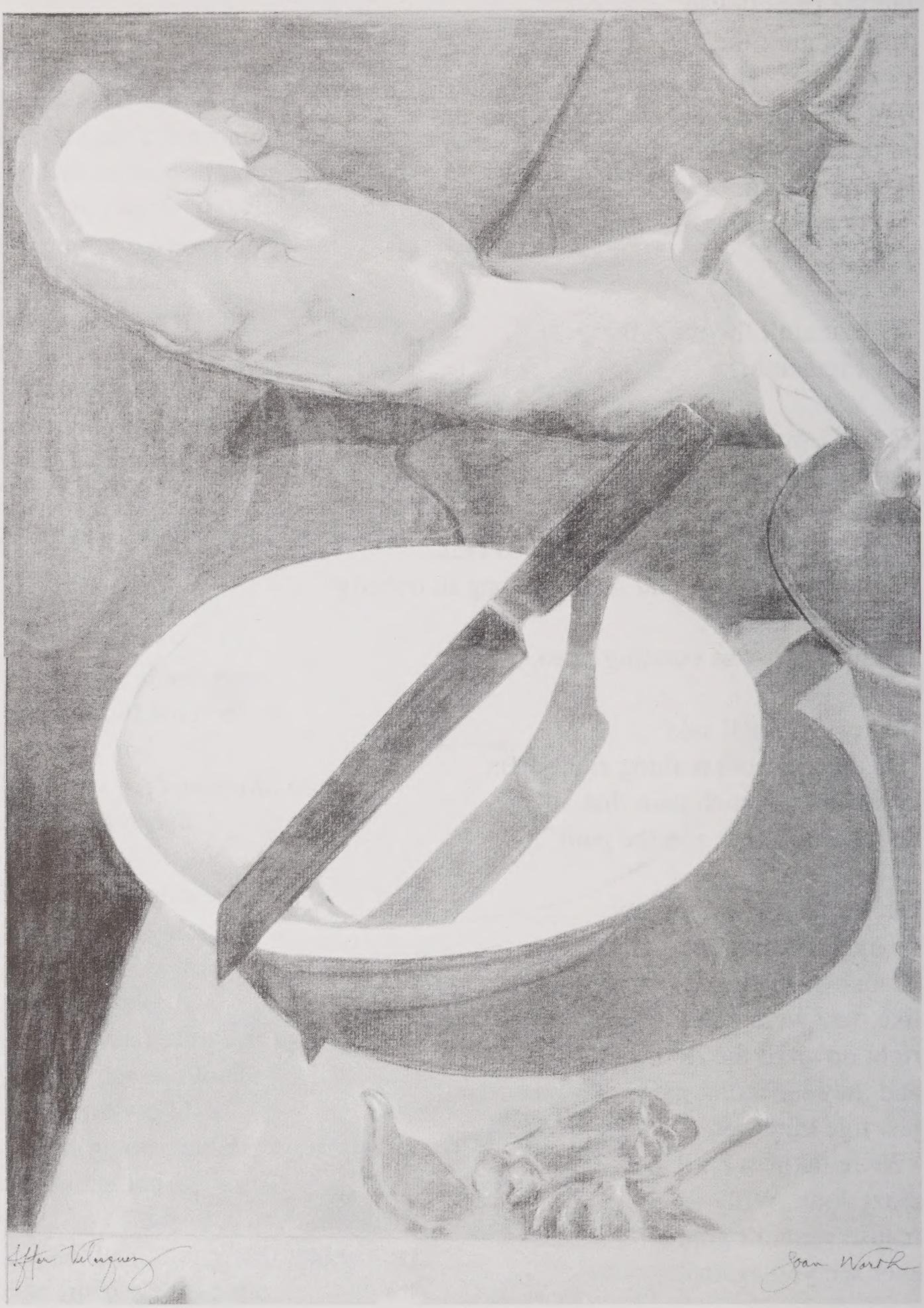
And that big "G"
on the big black cloth
over his coffin.
A brand new Mason,
he was.

But that ain't the main thing
that I remember.

'Cause I remember his eyes—
when I stood before him
and they were looking at me
like they were separate from Julius Hill.
Like they were lost and didn't belong to nobody
no more—
and his heart was bursting open.

Doctor Becknell said
"He didn't know nothing right then;
he was in so much pain that all
he felt and knew was the pain."

But I think his eyes knew,
though his mind did not.
'Cause they were exploding out
like they were gonna drop
right down to the floor—
and they looked at me
just like they were sayin',
"We're takin' a hard and
crazy look, Willy—
'cause we ain't gonna
ever see you again."



Drawing by Joan Worth

Telling Mama

Celia Miles

The deed was done. Well, it would take a year in North Carolina–but the decision was made. One divorce coming up. Relief was my main emotion; the waffling, the do or don't had taken too long. Now my problem was telling my mother. I didn't want to blurt it out over Sunday dinner at her house, didn't want to take a chance and tell her before Sunday dinner. She might throw up her hands and make us pimento cheese sandwiches instead of fried chicken, potato salad, and banana pudding. I didn't want to tell her before her Thursday afternoon driving lesson; any distraction and she'd scare her instructor even more than usual. Friday was a bad day; she was getting a permanent then rather than keeping her usual Wednesday appointment. She'd said, "I don't dare smell up Mr. Weston's car at my lesson." It would be cowardly to wait until after we'd stuffed ourselves at her table, soon-to-be ex-spouse and I, after our leisurely reclining on the porch for a couple of hours of gossip and burps, punctuated with swigs of iced tea.

My mother has a strong sense of honor. She'd think if I was going to divorce her favorite son-in-law, we certainly ought not to continue to sleep in the same house for a few weeks. No matter what she thought, she wouldn't ask if we were going to sleep in the same bed. She'd wonder if she should still call once a day and talk about her garden and the continuing household ailments to soon-to-be ex son-in-law. Could she still ask him to fix that broken window sash and carry those heavy bags of mulching material?

I was not the first in our family to do the deed. My mother's older sister had divorced in the early 1940s when it must have been a real shocker. But then, it was war time and she'd promptly joined the WAC and gone to serve her country, and returned with a new spouse. Our marriage, on the other hand, had survived a long two years past the first decade...and appeared to the family as stable, settled, secure. We didn't drink, fight, swear, run around, or do anything that called for action drastic as divorce. Our problem was not unhappiness exactly but the fatigue that came of concealing unhappiness. I should have acted miserable...that would have made it easier.

"Let's walk along the fence and I'll show you where the moles are digging up those bulbs you planted for us," I said. A slight breeze from the left caused me to change sides so my nostrils didn't close up from the smell

of her permanent wave solution. John was refereeing a high school wrestling match somewhere. I'd picked up my mother at the beauty parlor, inviting her to dinner. I'd put the roast in the oven along with some water in the bottom of the pan and some onions for flavor.

"What's that smell?" she said, stopping to break off some dead iris tops.

"Your new perm?" I was getting my first sentence constructed in my head.

"No, that's not it. Do you like this strawberry-lemon lotion Marie used?"

"It's okay," I replied. We tramped along, stepping on the raised furrows made by some underground creature intent on destruction.

"What a mess," my mother said. "And not a thing you can do about it. Mary Jane has tried everything—traps, poison, newfangled gizmos from that garden shop—and her yard is just a maze. She's going to get Jamie to plow up the whole thing."

"Speaking of a mess," I said. I couldn't get too interested really in destroying the mole population in a backyard that would next season be someone else's problem.

She smiled beatifically. "I've never had a mole anywhere near my yard."

"Mama," I said and watched her stamp her feet on the fresh dirt. She was going to have a time getting those Keds clean. She considered herself much more modern than her neighbor who still wore only black leather shoes, but she wasn't quite modern enough for socks. White Keds and nylon stockings for everyday activities Monday through Saturday; beige pumps for dress-up times and always on Sunday.

"We're getting a divorce," I said. "John and I are getting a divorce."

My mother stopped her stamping. The silence seemed so deep I could hear the moles underfoot scurrying for safety.

"Well, child," she said and that word brought tears to my eyes. "Well, I'll swear."

I looked over her head toward the house, willing the shine in my eyes to recede. Smoke was roiling through the open windows, through the back door.

"Yikes," I said.

"Lordy mercy," she said. We ran toward the house and into the roiling smoke. I started for the telephone in the living room. She had more sense.

"I knew I smelled something," she declared, throwing open the oven door, clicking off the oven. We both started fanning the smoke with dish towels and I cursed the silent smoke alarm. I'd known it didn't work—its little red light had been out for weeks, but I'd ignored it.

"Throw it out," I yelled when she yanked the roast from the oven. Then common sense said, "Can we save it?" The odor of scorched onions and blackened beef actually made that strawberry-lemon permanent wave smell delicious.

"Honey," my mother said as she kicked open the screen door and set the pan on the steps. "Sometimes something's burnt so bad it don't warrant saving."

We eyed the shriveled roast. "Don't even think it," she said. "You might think you can scrape it off and save it, but it's dried up inside."

"Let's get some iced tea, Mama," I said, "and go sit on the front porch. I've got a lot to tell you."

Photo by Joanne Johnston

Nancy Dillingham

excerpts from *First Light*

Drawings by Connie Smutz

Crow Tales

"If you split their tongues, they could talk."
Old Saying

1. Stodgy old men
in stiff black overcoats
like undertakers
line the fence
facing into the wind

2. Ornamental amid the stubble
of a snow-whitened field
the crows sit
black jewels
in winter's eye

3. A cacophony of crows
blackens the sky
diving, riding the air pockets
cartwheeling into the currents
like children, cawtalking

4. A raucous band of thieves
reconnoitering, decoying
as one of their own
slips through an open window
making way with shiny treasure

red ribbon trailing

Nancy Dillingham

The Crows Know

In need of respite and rest
she walks the dark-edged woods
wary of the morrow

Startled by the whoosh of wings
she looks up and spies in a tree
a bit of scarlet
wound into a crow's nest

Her mind leaps into memory—
a window opens . . .

her hair down
billowing against the pillow
unadorned yet lit by light

and—just in her sight—
dark-winged sorrow sits
unwinding the long red ribbon of joy

Nancy Dillingham

After Hog-killing

"Rattle your hocks! It's hog-killing time!"

Around Thanksgiving
when the weather gets cold
build a fire
shoot the hog . . .
scald, scrape
dress it—
tenderloin
backbone and ribs
pork chops
shoulders
middlin
ham hocks
salted down
in the smokehouse

Work up sausage
and souse meat
render out the good lard
and the bad
always fry
the sweet meat first
make biscuits and gravy
and crackling bread

Save the bladder
to blow up
like a ball
for the children

Use it all—
(even the slung chitlins)
everything but the squeal

Nancy Dillingham

Granny Woman

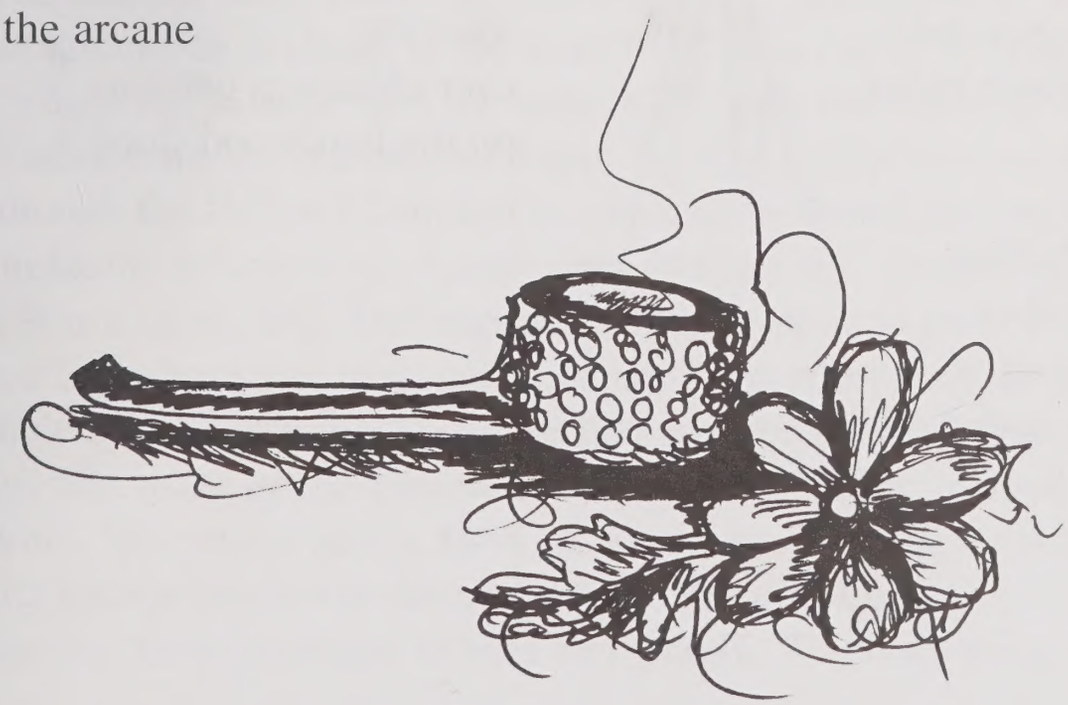
Shrunk like a doll
she lived in her tiny tarpapered shack
surrounded by paling

spent her days
smoking her pipe
lining up neatly on shelves
her bottles for doctoring

In her yard
swept clean
as a floor
except for
small squares of flower gardens
well-kept

she held forth
with anyone
who happened by

hocusing-pocusing
small children
giving off
a hint of the arcane



Nancy Dillingham

In the Valley

Lit by autumnal light
each golden leaf
becomes a star

The day glows
as night

In the Fall

Translucent
in the afternoon light
rain-doused
dogwood leaves
glow golden green
red orange flame
berry-jeweled

Working Tobacco

The only sound's
the quick hard talk
her hands make
as they move
down frozen stalks
picking them clean
as bones

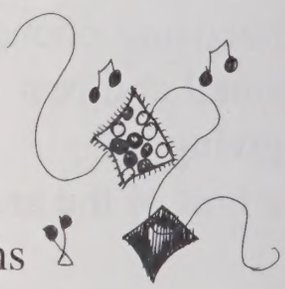
and the hollow
metallic click
of flayed stick
upon discarded stick

Quilting

With movements
easy as breathing
she takes up
her pieces
one by one
stitching them
into a mélange
of colored squares
until they fall
into a pattern
mellifluous and seductive
haunting as the harmony
of a church choir
calling

Hoedown

Threaded
by a fiddler's tune
and a caller's commands
hands and feet
lead a conversation
of four
weaving
ever-changing patterns
on the hardwood floor



Up the Creek

Barry Landsberg

Heard the expression "Up the creek without a paddle"? I was there but unfortunately had a paddle. Bob White is a scoutmaster. As in most troops, there is never enough parental participation. To get the additional adults needed for an outing, Bob asks his friends. He paints the outing in soft watercolors, making it sound like a trip to paradise. That was how I got drafted. My head was in the clouds; little did I know my feet would be in the water.

"Barry, I am taking the boys on a canoe trip. How would you like to go? We are starting at Old Forge and finishing at Tupper Lake. It is about eighty miles and will take one week. There will be plenty of time for fishing and swimming." It sounded great. The fact that I had never paddled a canoe did not bother me. All I could think of was large expanses of clear, cool water, with an occasional fish splashing through the flat surface, causing shimmering ripples.

We left about 11:00 PM on a balmy Friday night. By 7:00 AM, after an uneventful drive, the group arrived at Old Forge. Not one to be bothered by such minor things as sleep, Bob immediately began supervising the loading of the five canoes.

There were two people to a canoe, and, besides me and Bob, one other adult. The scouts ranged in ages from eleven through fifteen. I can best describe the scouts by comparing them to the Dead End Kids from the early 1940 movies. They came from a poor, tough neighborhood and would take nothing from anyone except maybe another person's property.

The Indians make canoeing seem very easy, and actually it is. Just remember this: when walking to the front of a canoe, keep both hands on the outer edges for balance; and the man in the back does the steering. With this advice we shoved off and began the first part of out watery journey though the Fulton Chain Lakes. In case, however, any unforeseen tipping problems swamped us, we all wore life jackets. Canoeing, although physical, is not strenuous. The important thing to do is to pace yourself. Unlike rowing, where you must continuously keep at the oars, in canoeing it is possible to drift. By lunchtime we had covered the first three of the eight lakes that make up the Fulton Chain. Bob's painting seemed to be coming true. We carried all the food we would need for the week. Everything except lunch was dehydrated and the menu was varied. It varied, ranging from pancakes to beef Stroganoff. The only thing I can

compare the crackers to would be plasterboard used in construction. It can easily be bitten and chewed into small pieces, but you cannot seem to swallow it.

After a brief gourmet lunch we were back in the water, paddling smoothly. Smoothly, that is, until we ran out of water. Thinking we must have taken a wrong turn, I could not understand why Bob was unloading his canoe and pointing the other canoes to clear landing areas. He answered my question with a matter-of-fact "This is our first portage." "Great," I said. "What the hell is a portage?" To my misfortune, I soon found out. I also discovered why I would probably never go on another canoe trip. A portage, it seems, is when a canoeist runs out of water and must transport his canoe and all equipment via land to the next body of water. This transportation, it should be added, is accomplished by footsore, back-breaking, lung-gasping power. Our portages (there were to be five) would range from a short quarter mile to a heart-rending mile and a half. While carrying my backpack of about 80 pounds on the first trip of the portage, the realization suddenly hit me, with the impact of a torpedo, that I would have to make this walk four more times. As a matter of fact, the quarter-mile portage suddenly became an excruciating mile-and-a-quarter trek. The canoes came in two different sizes. Three were fifteen feet in length and two were seventeen feet. Bob was able to carry one canoe and the seven scouts carried two canoes. That left the other adult, Jim, and me to carry the two seventeen-foot canoes. At the start of the portage the canoe weighed only 100 pounds, but at the end it felt like 500 pounds of aluminum anchor on each shoulder. Through trial and metal-denting error, we learned the best way to carry the canoe was upside down resting the edge of the canoe on our poorly padded shoulders. When at long last all our equipment was at the next lake, Bob calmly told us we still had two lakes to paddle before pitching camp.

I now know what drove the men on the Bounty to mutiny. Except for the fact that my weary arms would not move, I would have belayed Bob with an oar. Everyone reaches the limit of his endurance, but how do you explain that to a scout age eleven when the trip has just begun? The remainder of the week did not get better. Each day dragged by the same way. I dragged my weary legs on a portage. Each portage had its own unique peculiarity. One that seemed to be a dirt country road had the last 300 feet under knee-deep mud before we could put the canoes in the water. The mud delayed us long enough to feed the mosquitoes and black flies common to the area. Never one to look on the gloomy side of things, Bob told us we would not have to worry about leeches.

As with pleasure cruises, even slave ships reach their destination and the journey finally ends. While not my most memorable vacation, the trip is forever scrimshawed in my memory. Even today, if someone mentions portage, I can feel the heavy rims of the canoe on my shoulders and my knees begin to buckle.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Bel Canto

Randee Goodstadt

Means beautiful singing.
Refers to 19th century arias
Also Ann Patchett's wonderful book
About

Love which transcends speech

And

The power of beauty to elevate us.

Improbable relationships made
Possible by odd circumstance:

Hostage and terrorist,
Wealthy and poor,
Educated and illiterate,
Powerful and oppressed,
Performer and audience.

Ah, how a human mind can create such a story!
And my gratefulness to be another human being,
Who can wrap herself warmly, absorbed completely
In the characters and the tale.

Lost in the book.
And somehow, a little bit transformed
By the healing power of art.

Tempus Fugit/Hamlet's Solution

Randee Goodstadt

Time is flying, but where does it go?
How does it change itself so?

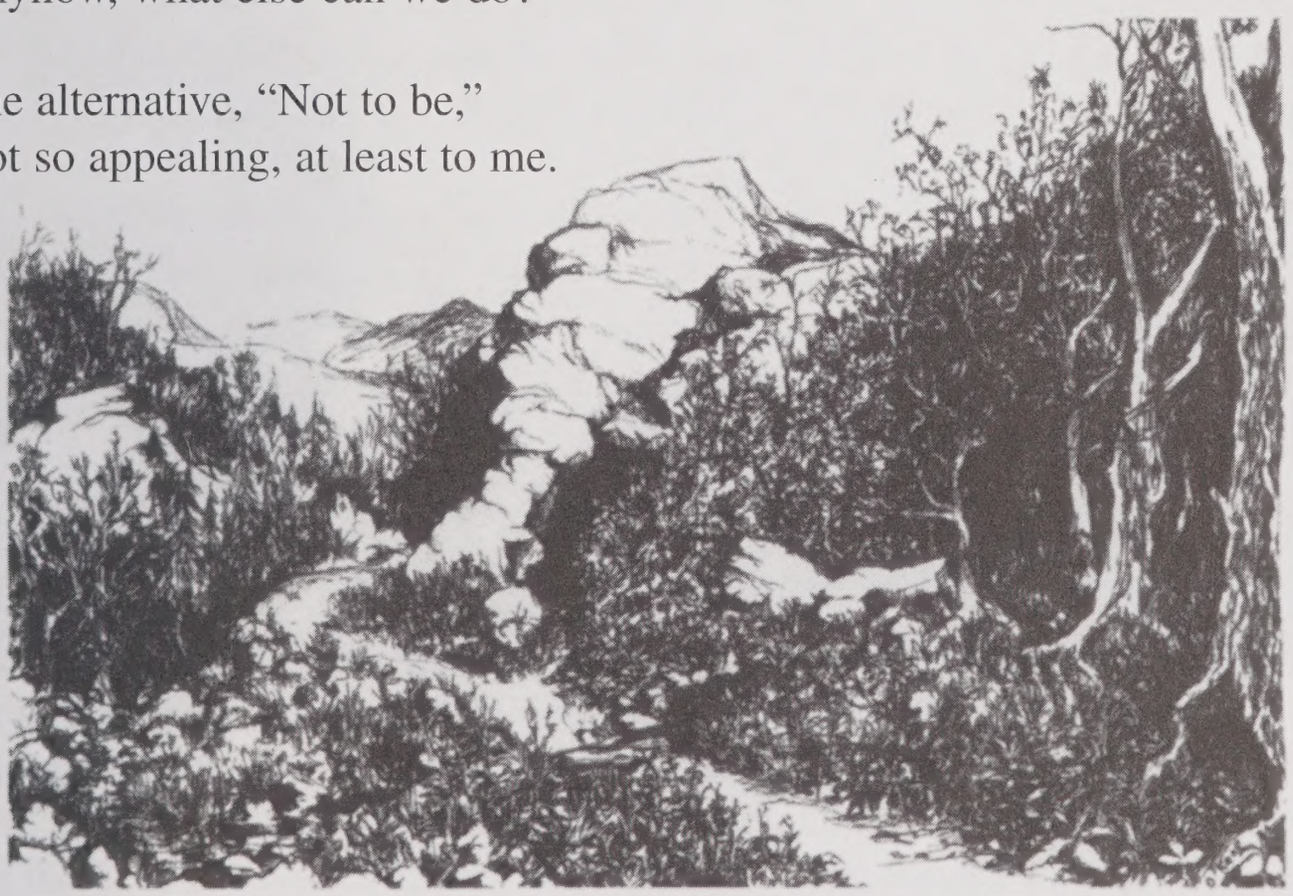
(To crow's feet around my eyes
Heaviness in my thighs
Wrinkles on my face
Increasing lack of grace.)

But let's not forget the rest:
Time also makes one best!
As wisdom sure increases
And misery decreases.

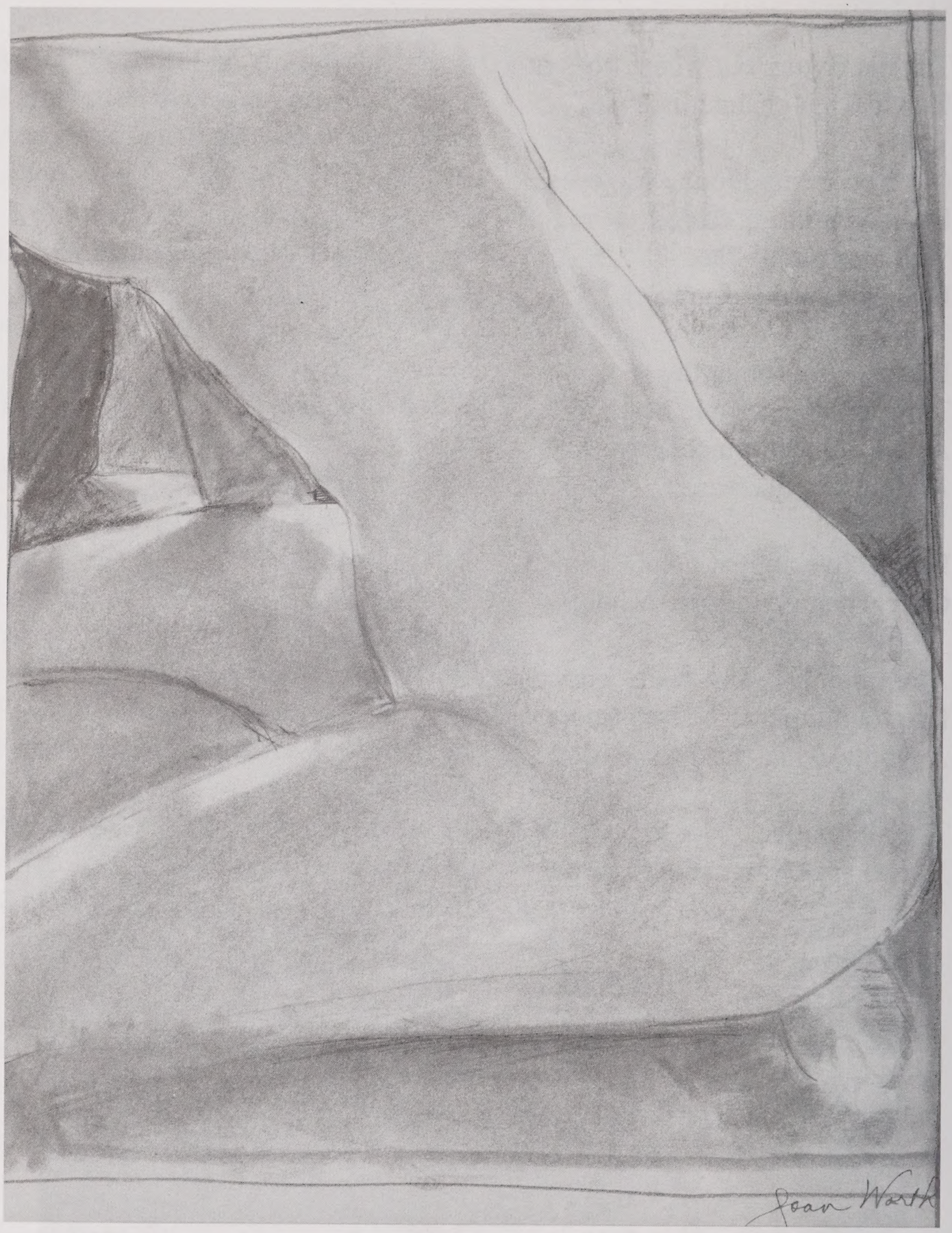
Perspective a great help
Over when you were a whelp.

And time, they say, heals wounds
I've found that to be true (more or less!)
Anyhow, what else can we do?

The alternative, "Not to be,"
Not so appealing, at least to me.



Drawing by Mike O'Kane



Drawing by Joan Worth

The Inside World of Miss America

Debra Deitering Maddox, Miss Iowa 1984

A part of the America landscape for 76 years, its theme song is one of three tunes most recognizable to Americans. It's the only program Tricia and Julie Nixon were allowed to stay up late and watch, and tens of millions of Americans will tune in every September to view the tradition, fairy tale and pressure cooker that make up the Miss America Pageant.

But there's far more to Miss America than just the television event. Its year-long preparation involves more than 300,000 volunteers producing 3,000 local and state pageants showcasing 80,000 contestants. A vast network of "pageant people" across the country proudly call themselves the Miss America Family, keeping each other informed on which up-and-coming contestants possess "The Look" needed to become "Miss A."

There's even a Miss America Sorority—Mu Alpha Sigma—replete with sorority pin. Toss in 12,700,000 television viewers, a multi-million-dollar business and there's Miss America. Sprinkle in a few ulcers, a flood of tears, and a bevy of backdoor politics, and that's Miss America, too.

For me, the Miss America Pageant is more than an annual television event. For four years it was a major part of my life as I wound my way through the Iowa pageant system, eventually representing the state in the 1985 contest. I still watch the pageant, but with a more practiced, cynical eye born of experience and hindsight.

Like all Miss America aspirants, I had first to win a local pageant—which is patterned after the national contest with interview, evening gown, talent and swimsuit competitions. I eventually won the local title of Miss Southwest Iowa; this local pageant then sponsored me at the Miss Iowa level. I received a scholarship, wardrobe allowance and all-expense-paid trip to the state contest. State representatives receive the same awards for the Miss America competition held each September in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

At Miss America

At the national contest, we contestants were welcomed into pure unadulterated chaos, a disruptive media circus. Following publicity of sexually explicit photographs, Vanessa Williams had prematurely relinquished her crown seven weeks before and the pageant was temporarily without a queen. There had been no crisis-management plan and the Miss America Pageant was blindly feeling its way through

unprecedented territory. The press was all over the controversy and here we were, 51 hopeful girls, arriving on the scene to prepare for a live production and dream come true.

Ceaseless activity makes Miss America an endurance test in high heels. Eighteen-hour days filled with events, appearances and rehearsals—always thinking, doing, acting and looking your best. The rehearsal fashion parade advertised the economic inequities between the states. Miss Texas wore $100,000 in diamonds; Miss North Dakota confided that her state was barely able to pay her airfare to the pageant.

My feet swelled two sizes. Even my hair got tired—of being curled, sprayed, pinned, pulled and teased. Big hair. Emotional and physical fatigue set in; facades cracked. And through it all, I could not shake an overwhelming sensation of hurtling along destiny's highway toward an unknown destination. Incessant activity offered no opportunity to regroup and gain objectivity.

I looked fate straight in nine pairs of judges' eyes. These human beings, these mere mortals, came before me with hidden biases and agendas. I stood before them full of hope, dreams and wishes as only the young can possess. They would decide my fate, these people I did not know.

If chosen Miss America, my life would forever be changed. I'd go places, meet people, experience worlds otherwise not open to me. Where I lived, my chosen profession, whom I married could ultimately be affected by those nine people sitting in front of me. I'd never felt so vulnerable. Virtual strangers playing God with my life. It was something I thought about often.

Saturday. The longest wait of all began with a 5 a.m. alarm. All contestants were sequestered at Convention Hall by 7 a.m. Telephone calls were not allowed; radios were confiscated; no one but contestants and production people were permitted inside the building. More rehearsals. Interminable waiting. Cut from contact with the outside world, the secret of the Top 10 was secured until the 10:10 evening production. Mine was not one of the coveted ten names called out that evening.

Being Miss America

Miss America is crowned; the TV cameras turned off. Miss America attends her first press conference as contestants pack up and empty the dressing room before heading for the Miss America Ball. Scholarships are awarded, food eaten, dances danced, goodbyes said. Miss

America, her family, chaperone, and others sit within a decorated gazebo pavilion.

Finally—after two bone-wearying, stress-filled weeks of 15-hour days—the place shuts down. The Miss America experience is over. It's 2 a.m. or later. The new Miss America will get three hours of sleep before preparing for her scheduled early-morning beach photography session. A New York press conference is held in the afternoon, followed by a shopping spree to choose her wardrobe for the year. A round of early morning news shows will follow early Monday morning. The hectic year has begun.

It has been said that the two loneliest people in the country are the President of the United States and Miss America. A young woman no more than 24 years of age, Miss America travels 20,000 miles a month, settling in a different hotel room each night, surrounded always by a constantly changing sea of strange faces except for her ever-present chaperone.

The appearance schedule set before she's even crowned, Miss America gets only two weeks off during her year's reign. There is little privacy, little personal time, a need to always look, act, and be her best. It's an unnatural pressure that has caused many an unpublicized Miss America ulcer.

The upside is that, during her reign, Miss America will meet numerous celebrities, dignitaries and politicos and will have entrée to Hollywood parties, the Super Bowl, Macy's Thanksgiving Parade and various television shows. She will earn $200,000 (in addition to her $50,000 scholarship) and have increased career opportunities, earning potential and doors open to her upon completion of her reign.

The Propaganda Machine

As in most things, there are two sides to every picture. And no matter what else it may be—scholarship pageant, beauty contest, American tradition, career launchpad—the Miss America Pageant is, in fact, a large propaganda machine—an organization fraught with the mines of politics, secrets and big business agendas that make up a secret world behind the crown of Miss America.

A world that doesn't talk of the anorexia or bulimia, the contestant depression that too many times follows a disappointing finish, the unawarded prizes, hidden rehearsal cameras, the misperceptions purposely perpetuated. But then, Miss America is a business dependent on image, public interest and public perception. It may be a nonprofit organization,

but it spells out big bucks for a slew of industries: hotels, souvenirs, consultants, fashion, make-up, hair, etc.

The Secrets Behind the Crown

Miss America emphasizes its status as a scholarship pageant, ever mindful that it is the largest source of academic scholarships for women in the country, awarding $32 million in scholarships each year. Although technically true, some of this $32 million includes tuition scholarships given by colleges to title holders only if they attend that university.

Most times a contestant is already pursuing a degree at another institution, and the scholarship goes unused, its value becoming part of the collective $32 million pot. Sometimes the award is extended from an out-of-state university, making the use of it even more improbable.

Perceiving Miss America as a scholarship pageant seems most ironic when examining some of the educational track records of its main spokeswoman, icon, and symbol, Miss America:

- Marjorie Vincent, Miss America 1991, was four hours shy of receiving her law degree from Duke University upon winning the title. She never returned to school, choosing instead to pursue a television reporting position in Meridian, Mississippi.
- Although Carolyn Sapp's (Miss America 1992) platform was education, she has yet to finish her Bachelor's degree and, at last word, was not attending college.
- Leanza Cornett, Miss America 1993, also never completed her undergraduate degree, but headed to Hollywood for a short stint on Entertainment Tonight. She continues to appear periodically on television programs.
- Miss America 1995, Heather Whitestone, hit the motivational speaking circuit and got married, never returning to college to finish her undergraduate degree.
- Shawntel Smith, Miss America 1996, is still on the motivational speaking circuit and has not yet returned to graduate school.
- The recent retiring Miss America, Tara Holland, was in her second year of graduate school when crowned. Her immediate plans are to continue touring as a motivational speaker and singer.

That's a lot of Miss Americas with no college degrees—in a program purporting to exist in order to bring women additional scholarship

opportunities. Miss America's $50,000 scholarship is paid directly to her educational institution. If she doesn't return, the scholarship goes unused.

Can Anyone Be Miss America?

They'd like you to think so. The reality:

- In the 77-year history of the pageant, a handful of states have never made the Top Ten and 24 states have never had a Miss America. Money makes the difference. Some states have big budgets for the best possible coaching for make-up, modeling, interviewing, and fitness training. Custom-made clothing is created by top-notch designers. Yes, these big-budgeted states consistently do better at Miss America.
- "...fairest of the fair, your idea, all-American face and form...." Words describing Miss America, certainly the most qualified, best all-around contestant. Not necessarily so. In their most unguarded moments, pageant insiders concede that Miss America chooses an image it wants portrayed, looking for the contestant best fitting that role. Sometimes it's beauty, perhaps it's brains, could be time for a Horatio Alger story. For the contestant, it's a crap shoot, and all you can do is your best for peace of mind.
- Every year, Non-Finalist Talent Awards are awarded according to the contestants' preliminary talent scores. This year three vocalists, two ballet dancers, two pianists, two dramatic monologues and a baton twirler were so honored. On the surface, it would appear that a young woman possessing any type of talent could have a shot at the title. But when scrutinized, these numbers don't add up to a mathematically representative sample. Of the 51 contestants, 58 percent sang vocal selections, 22 percent performed some type of dance routine, 16 percent played piano, and 4 percent gave a dramatic monologue. Seven of the Top 10 semifinalists sang, and six of the past seven winning Miss Americas performed vocal selections. Non-Finalist Talent Award winners just don't match up. And they don't ... year after year. They're disproportionate to the total universe. Why is that? Regardless, the perception given the masses is that anyone can be Miss America.

In all fairness, I cannot deny what the Miss America Pageant system has done for me; I would not be the person I am today. It demanded my best as a student, athlete, musician and person. It offered up the challenge and forum to self-actualize, enabling me to reach my potential at that

particular stage of my life. I discovered unknown abilities and talents that have been subsequently fostered, enjoyed and utilized. For that, I give appropriate credit.

Yet, years of experience and hindsight have also enlightened me to the special introduction Miss America gave me to big business, image, politics and corporate hidden agendas. I'd intuitively known and felt things circulating around me, but lacked the experience and wisdom to put together the pieces.

When I encountered these elements again in the business world, I began to understand my Miss America experience with greater clarity—and deeper sadness. I was forced to concede that nothing is sacred anymore, not even Miss America, and that perhaps its pristine ideals exist only in the starry eyes of youth not yet grown up enough to know any better.

Illusion
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

The Waters Always Parted for Her

Kenet Adamson

"If you think clothes don't make a difference,
try walking down the street without any."

She twirls
And sun-bleached, blond
Butt-length hair swirls.
Blowing a kiss to her
Buff, blond, boyfriend,
We watch her
Watch us
Watch her
Fashion ensemble:
Black platform Ecco shoes,
Virgin Dolce & Gabbana slacks,
Pink Gap blouse,
Black A&F sweater.
She glides back
And forth
Before the runway.
The SAS jet lands.
A Gauloise cigarette
Burns, Sony headphones
Hang, Ericsson cell phone
Plays a Culture Club tune.
The Louis Vuitton luggage
Arrives. Boyfriend two, swarthy,
and smarmy,
Enters to pick up
Her bags.

Image is Everything

Kenet Adamson

Emergency Flotation Device
Drunken patchwork quilt.
Patterns of plains, plants and cities.
Far below my seat.

Gettin' the Paper
Sons and I skip
Crunching walnut shells. Springer
Spaniel chasing squirrels.

At a Redlight Overlooking I-240 and the Exxon Station
A shaggy head rests
Hanging out of the car
Window looking backwards. Smoke bawls
Out of the tailpipe and window.
His mother sucks on a
Virginia Slim, and coughs as
The car drives on.

Class Dis-
Missed
Students smoke and lounge
Languidly around the birch tree deck.
Vacated cicada shells.

The Lovesick Maiden
She makes love to it.
Sucking a cigarette deep,
fingertips and lips.

Counterbalance
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

In Search of Perfection

Joanne S. Johnston

On an early fall morn, 'twas a natural thing to do—
going in pursuit of a perfect rose.

Bushes high from a summer's growth
gave evidence of care from spray;
and because of the pruner's shears,
new growth appeared.

Along the way, I looked and sniffed
past Prominent, Crimson Glory,
Peace, Chrysler Imperial, Tropicana,
Love, Double Delight, and more
whose names escape me now.

Beauty so prevalent but with flaws
here and there.
Past its prime.
Dark with mildew
or age spots
Too small.

Amid countless blooms,
the perfect rose
rested on Mr. Lincoln's bush.

I stopped in awe
to take in its beauty
which stood noticeably
above all the others.

Soon I knew
if this visit had come at noonday,
this rose, too, would have been passed over.

And remembered again how easy
it is to discount
and dismiss
what was beautiful
in pursuit of what is beautiful
without realizing how quickly
the fading begins.

Photo by Joanne S. Johnston

Drawing by Joan Worth

Things I Say to Myself While Teaching

Kenet Adamson

"Open your books to Shelley's poem "Ozymandias."
You'll notice his style …"
Does this outfit make me look fat?
It's just like watching bobble-headed student dolls in the rear window of my class.
Their heads bounce and their brains boing.
I need to remember to schedule my car's inspection.
This is my best material. What do they expect. Aren't they zombies today?
It doesn't get better than this.
And why does that boy keep putting his hand up his shirt and rubbing his nipples?
"…Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert…"
I'd better hike up my fat pants.
They're too tight.
I need to skip lunch.
Bob's not here.
How many mothers has he had die this semester?
Oh goody. Angel is finally here. I can start over again.
"We're on page 9."
"No you didn't miss a thing last Friday. We just sat around and mourned your absence."
I need some chocolate.
Why did Tammi have to bring in a Cinnibon sweet roll?
The smell is killing me.
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!"
At least Brandy is being oh so subtle
about sending messages to Cliché over her cell phone.
At least I can count on Sarah on not being disruptive.
She doesn't snore, so that helps.
"Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."
"Remember to read the rest of the story and be prepared to discuss it on Wednesday.
I expect you to show more interest and involvement and not just daydream.
Except for Sarah who is actually dreaming."

Garden Creek

Julia Nunnally Duncan

The water held no more than rocks
and an occasional rusted hubcap that
washed from the filling station on the
other side of the creek bank.
The water was shallow and usually clear,
but dingy at times with silt.
Its fragrance was not of galax or pine
or other pungent or sweet smells
of mountain brooks;
all one smelled was the fumes of gasoline
from nearby pumps
or exhaust from cars on the highway.
Yet those days I sat content on the footbridge
that crossed my grandmother's creek
at the edge of her backyard—
a bridge made of two shaved logs and hand-sawed boards,
with rotted holes big enough for a dog's leg to get
trapped in or a child's foot;
a bridge made by my grandfather Matt,
long dead and known to me only
in pictures stored in a frayed Victorian album
or in an ornate framed portrait,
both hidden upstairs in a darkened room.
Those days I sat with a bamboo pole,
a line and maybe a safety pin for a hook,
the hook lightly carried downstream in the current.
I was patient, waiting for a fish that would never bite,
encouraged by sight of
an occasional salamander or frog.
A short walk away ran the muddy waters
of the Catawba River,
in its depths all the mud turtles, snakes,
catfish and carp

a seasoned fisherman might hate or hope to see,
one weary from the cotton mill
or carpentry job,
stealing some time,
leaning over the riverbank with Camel cigarette in mouth,
spinning rod in hand.
But on those warm summer days
in the 1960's
I preferred the quiet waters of Garden Creek,
my grandmother in the house
sitting in front of the black and white Zenith
watching *Video Village* hosted by Monty Hall—
her favorite show—
and I, alone, sitting on the bridge,
pole in hand, sneaking a look across the highway
towards the gently sloping street
where my parents, brother, dog, and I lived,
waiting for a fish to bite
and three-thirty to arrive
so my father would come
to take me home.

Photo by Lee Sokol

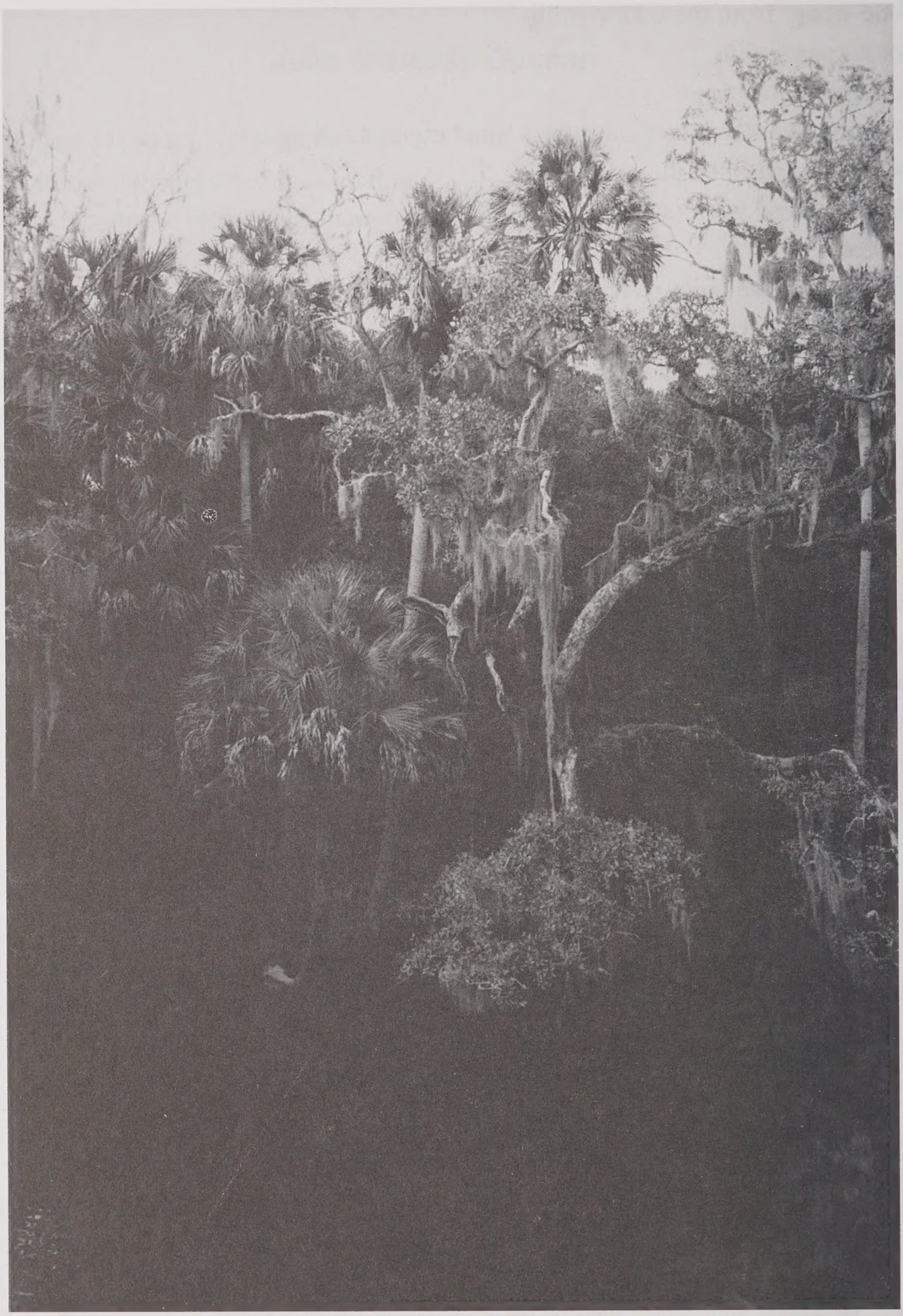


Photo by Lee Sokol

Auction

Joyce E. Dover

The day I received an invitation to the estate auction of the late Etrulia Briggs, I felt ecstatic and grateful John remembered me. His mother, a dear friend and a lady, taught me to realize the importance of doing one productive thing every day of my life. She set that example. The one thing that she never learned to do was to play her Wurlitzer grand piano but I, often, was invited to play for her. I always dreamed of owning a piano of such grandeur, but never did I think that I would own this beautiful piece of furniture.

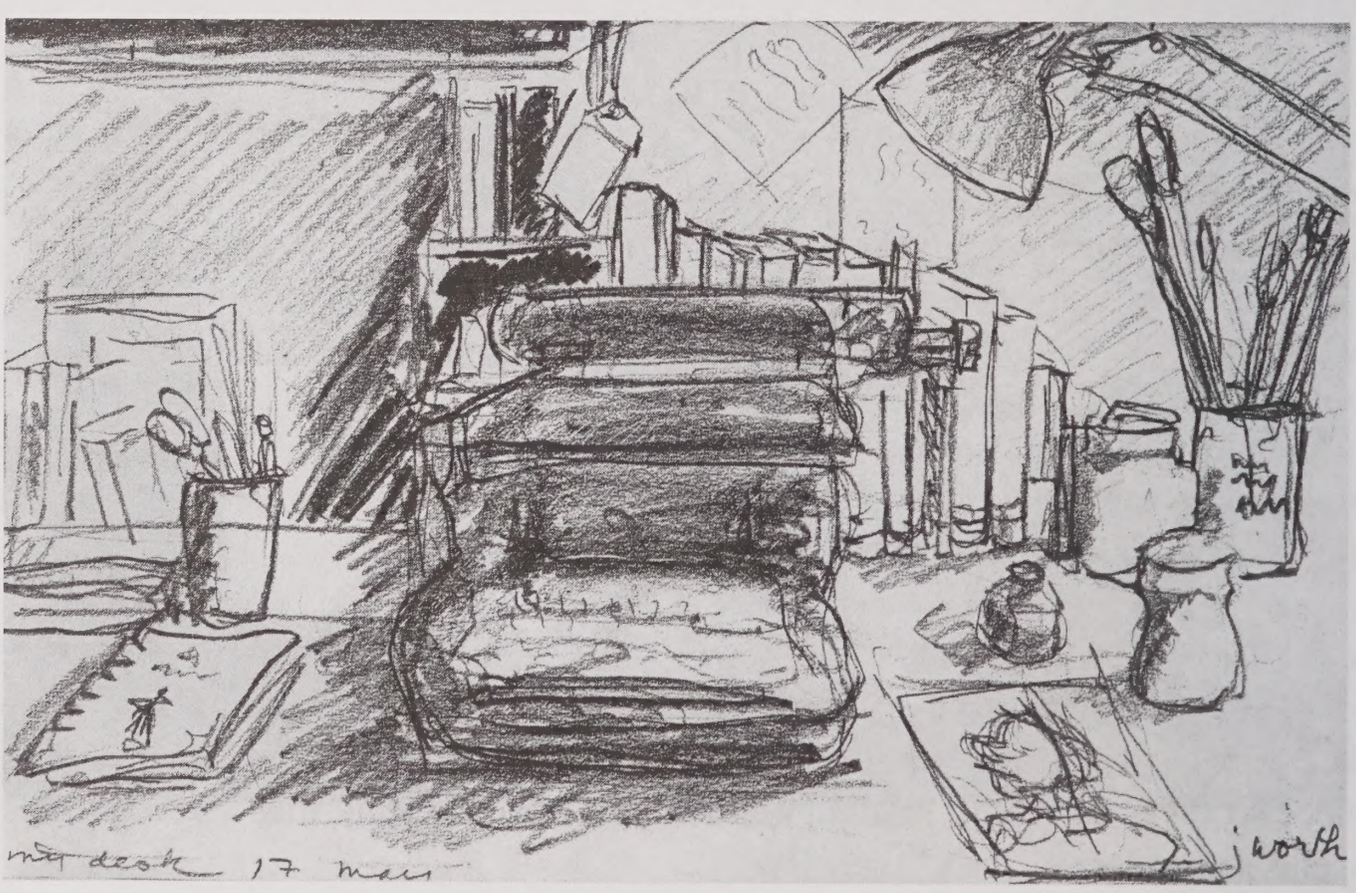
John extended the invitation to a preview of the items the day before the auction. I drove to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on Friday, May 16, 1997. My emotions were mixed as I approached the big two-story brick house. A part of me was filled with the excitement of a long-time desire of owning this elegant piano; yet, I was saddened because I knew of Mrs. Briggs' hope that her family would treasure and keep her beloved possessions and, eventually, pass them down to the younger generation. This wish would go unfulfilled.

I saw many beautiful china pieces that Mrs. Briggs had hand painted. There were tall vases with peacocks in vibrant blues and greens. There were plates of every size and each was painted with various flowers, fruits, and birds. She painted roses in every color and each rose was different. It would have been hard for me to choose a favorite, as they were all beautiful. John gave me a plate that was ornately framed that Mrs. Briggs had painted. It was a basket of American Beauty red roses and white baby's breath. I was also given a couple of vases that were originals of her artistry.

There were clusters of grapes made of buckeyes that Mrs. Briggs had wired together. She carved wooden rhododendron knots into chickens, birds, and insects. The most painstaking piece of art that I saw her make was a lady-bug crafted from a grape seed and fine black thread. There were items that she made from rocks, cones, seashells, weeds, and even dollhouse furniture made from tin cans, for which I had the winning bid.

On the warm, sunny day of the auction, the yard filled with people. There were antique dealers, curiosity seekers, and then people like me, who had a personal interest in this lady's artwork and furniture. Her furniture was antique and some of the pieces had been set in the yard because the house would have been too small to accommodate the number of people who had arrived for this big event. The piano that I had gone to buy was in the house. I really didn't think that I would ever be able to afford this prized piece so I was careful in bidding on the other pieces, fearful that I would over-spend my budget.

Finally, the time came for the sale of the piano. I was praying that if it was God's will, I would be the high bidder. Several people who were interested in the piano went into the living room of the house. I stood there scanning the room, analyzing everybody's face, wondering how much money they would spend. The bidding opened at $5,000; then the real torture began. As quickly as I could call out a hundred more, one of the other rivals would just knock my bid down. I thought, "Why don't they quit?" As I got weaker and more anxious, the bidding came down to me and one other lady. She looked like someone who came from *The Little House on the Prairie*. I will never forget her straw hat, turned up with a sunflower attached, and her yellow print dress. I was feeling weaker by the moment so I tried to stare at her confidently to let her know that I was going to have that piano regardless of the cost. What she didn't know was I was right on the verge of throwing in the towel because I was nearly to my limit. I would be the high bidder—then the auctioneer would say, "Going, Going, now folks, you know that this piano is a real quality piece." Then the little lady would again call out another hundred dollars. I was beginning to dislike the auctioneer because he was taking too much time and using his experienced sales pitches to get my rival to bid again. When the auctioneer finally said, "Going, Going, Gone," and pointed to me and yelled "Sold to Number One," I just stood there and cried. I could not believe that I had just become the owner of a 61-year-old cherry French provincial grand piano and the bench with a needlepoint pad of red roses against a black background, the piano that Mrs. Briggs had repeatedly asked me to play. Her favorite was *Beautiful Dreamer* and to this day, I still play her song.



Drawing by Joan Worth

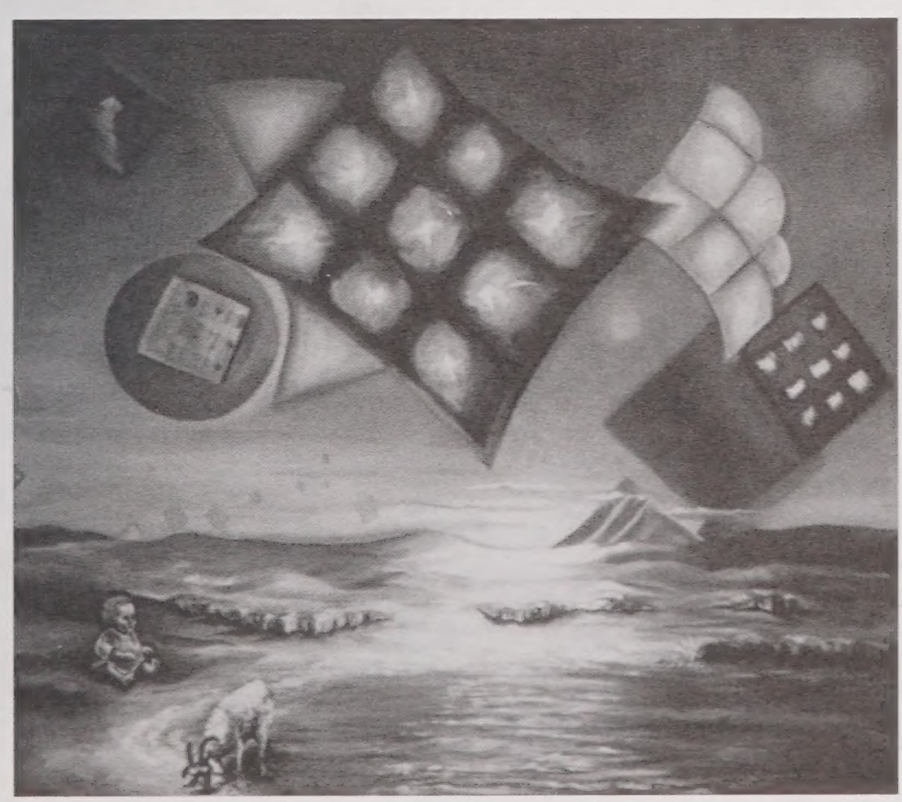
Greensboro Days

Dara Llewellyn

I've walked these streets before,
Uncertain then with youth,
lithe with hope
traveling avenues of knowledge
around campus and into my mind.

The homes on West Market look the same
but Cedar Street is gone.
The companions I traveled with—
scattered across the land.
We were brave once, caring,
free of boundaries, daring,
waltzing the night away,
drunk on life and champagne.

I waltz on occasion now,
less certain with age,
less lithe with hope,
treading streets less safe,
still dancing free and unfettered.



What Reeve Saw
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

A Winter Cleanse

Dara Llewellyn

I delight in the scouring winds of winter,
howling out of the North,
whipping barren chestnut limbs,
smashing dead poplar branches to the ground,

ripping out tattered cobwebs,
slashing away weeds and debris.
removing the detritus of seasons past,

Essential form is left,
brimming with sap—soon to rise,
dancing in a wintry ballet.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Bearing the Load

To the Victims of the World Trade Center
September 11, 2001

Michael McCarthy

"It will be more than any of us can bear."
New York City Mayor Rudolf Giuliani

We saw you.
At windows, framed by terror,
We saw you.
We saw walls come crashing down,
Load-bearing walls.

We saw, and our eyes ached.
We saw,
And our eyes couldn't bear it.
Like Oedipus,
We wished we had not eyes to see.

Builders speak of load-bearing walls.
Your load-bearing walls
Could not withstand the hatred-heat.
Like your walls,
We could not bear it.
We knelt to lay down the burden,
And kneeling, were given strength.

Dust darkened a city,
The dust of hearts and hopes ground to powder.
Dust drifted over a city,
Dachau-dust,
Fresh ashes, from a fresh hatred-burn.
Ash-dust of our countrymen.
Dust which gave testimony,
Eloquent in soft silence,
Testimony to the sad impotence of self-nursed hatreds,
Which cannot create, only destroy.

"The world breaks everyone," Hemingway said,
"And afterward, some are stronger at the broken places."
Your dust became our spiritual mortar.
Mortar to mend, mortar to heal,
Mortar to strengthen,
Strengthen our broken places,
Strengthen
Our hearts to bear the load,
That you tried to bear for us.

Can we now see?
Can we now bear this load?
Like T.S. Eliot,
We have seen fear
In a handful of dust.
Our prayer:
For strength to overcome
The darkness of dust.

Our hearts rise up
Through your dust.
Our eyes look up
Through your dust,
Strengthened by you, our heroes,
To become strong supporting souls,
To become load-bearing walls ourselves.

Beyond this place,
On another shore,
Two towers rise up,
Twin pillars of souls,
…bearing the load.

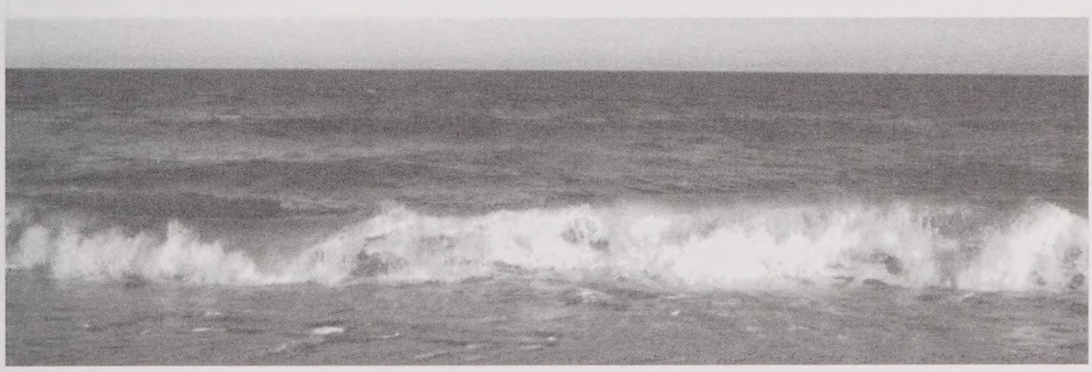
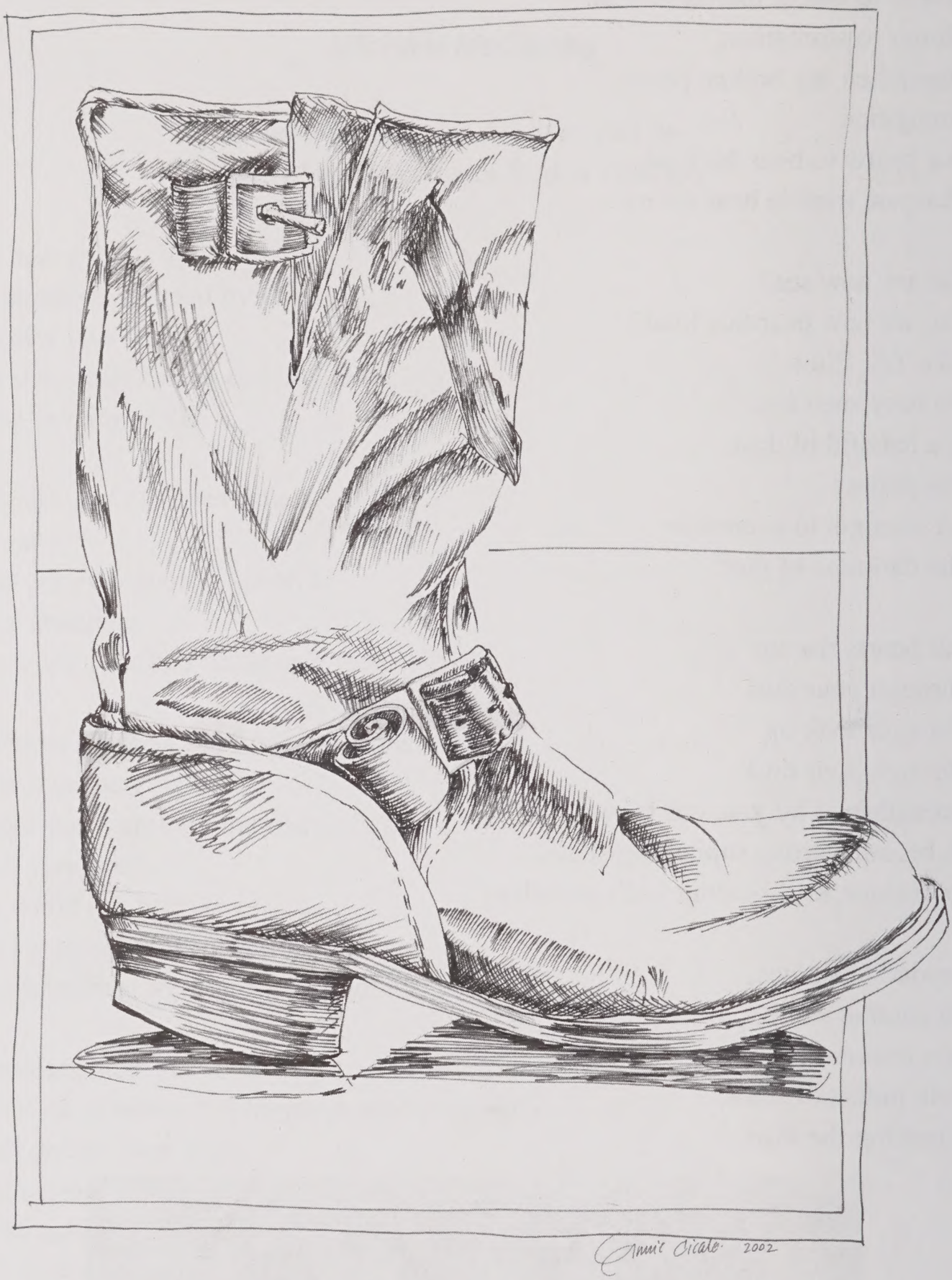


Photo by Eugene Pressley



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Power's Out

Joanne S. Johnston

'Twas a sneaky wind that challenged the limb to stay in its place on the oak tree.
Without knowing the rules of the game, the limb was "in" only to be "off"—off into the abyss below.
Toward its final destination, the limb bobbed back and forth and visited the utility
company's investment strung from here to there in the vast expanse of sky.
With a thwack and a spark and a thud, both found a new resting place off the tourists' road.

Power's out!
Urban life changes quick as a spark can fly and a limb can fall.

City slickers struggle in houses accustomed to warmth on a winter's day as chill down comes,
and huddling is re-discovered to ward off the cold.

Urban cowboys ride their pickups to the corner 7-Eleven for artificial logs to burn in make-believe fireplaces.
Roughing it means that city farmers bully cans of ravioli with hand-held can openers.

Fixing food means warming something on a wood stove or over the open fire
While gourmet soup and scrambled eggs lend credibility to the menu.
VCRs don't work and television is useless.
Hair goes unwashed when a plug-in nets no hot air for drying.

Bath time is delayed
as hot water heaters refuse to do their usual task
And chill bumps are in style.

Bed time comes early as dark
Under blankets like pioneers with enough cover designed to keep bodies still
so the cold doesn't matter so much.

Conversation is as strange as the shadows on the wall,
But Quietness needs a break now and then.

Oh Man, for all thy sophistication in a modern world,
How quickly is humility visited upon thee.

Untitled

Mike O'Kane

Black faces appear in the classes that I teach
Sometimes one, sometimes two in each course
And all too often then, they quietly disappear again
In a silent retreat, no discussion or explanation. Just gone
In some way so fragile that they barely touch the experience
Before they leave, like shadows...
Unwilling to be exposed under such predominantly white light. Where every move
Becomes an indicator of a different race. Where stereotype becomes self-fulfilling
Self-sabotage, self-scrutiny, self-judgement.

I feel the pain of witnessing a wrongness.
We all have some knowledge of the quiet abandonment of dreams.
Of internal cycling scripts and stories that close down possibilities.
Instead of opening them. Your loss is all of our loss.

How can this pressure be released? How might you feel welcome?
What kind of safety and permission do you need
To bring your true and undiluted self into these rooms?
What does your spirit wish to hear? What keys can turn these locks?
What doors open from my side in this so utterly divided house?

Photo by Jim Hornaday

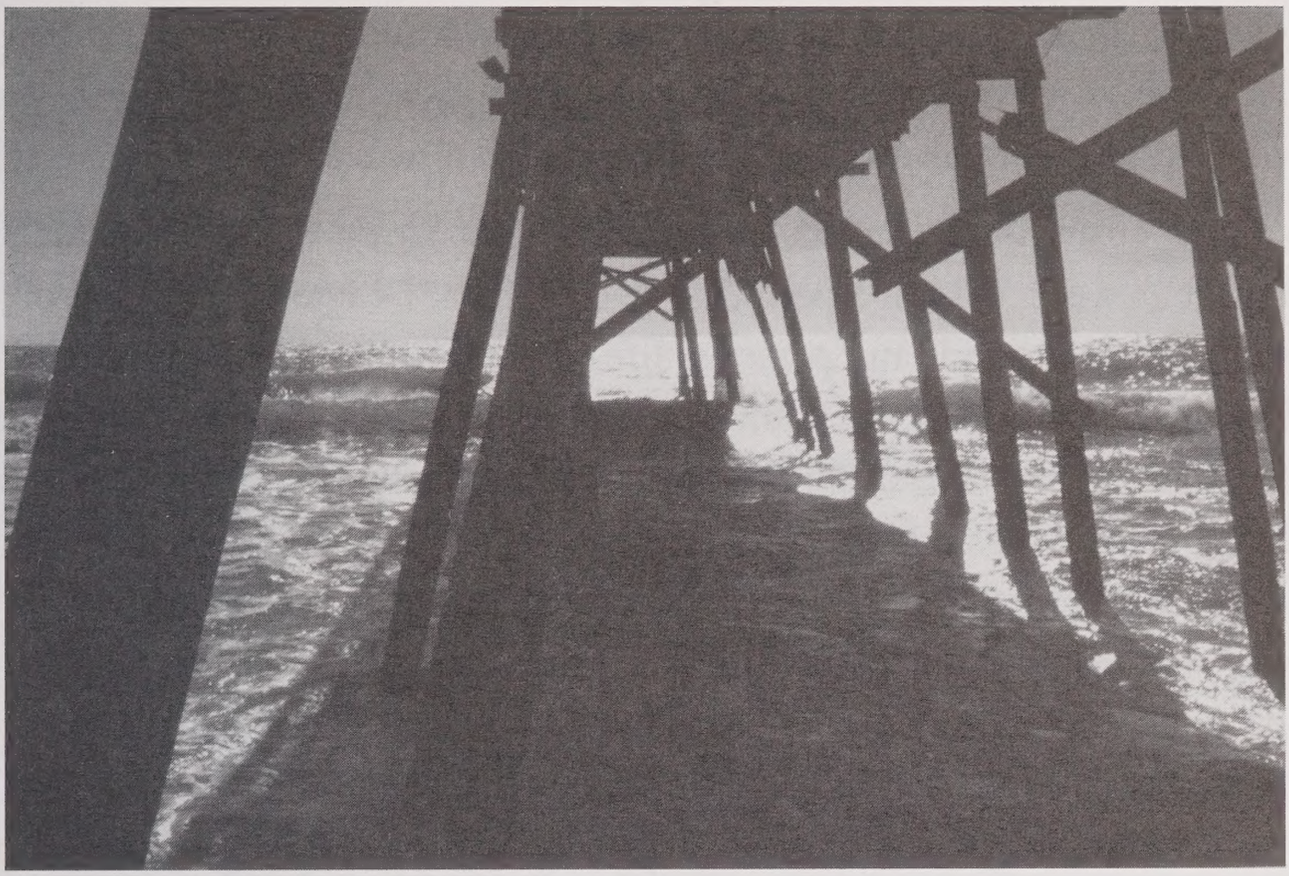


Photo by Eugene Pressley

Loss

Richard J. De Luca

inevitable consequence of life
wraps me in its ebony wings
its heart drumming my name,
I swallow my tears,
steel myself,
yet
see through winter's glass
back-lit, black-lit arrows
cawing across the sky
to pierce my soul
once more.

Getting By on Less

Joanne S. Johnston

In business, it's called "downsizing," but families and individuals can do it as well. Within a period of two months, I came to the point of wanting to downsize in my personal life. Perhaps it came because I had a birthday, spent six weeks in China, or simply realized I had too much of the world's goods. Whatever the reason, I became ready to strip my life down to fewer possessions and greater simplicity.

Getting to this point didn't happen all at once, of course. My family went through the cycle of going from apartment living to a small house and then to a larger house in a nice neighborhood in a small town. We loved where we lived at each place along the way.

Being in a big house for twenty years was not only a joy, but also a privilege. I have always known how blessed I was and have tried never to take my bounty for granted. However, it became evident that four of the seven rooms in our house were rarely used. That left three in regular demand, plus the bathrooms and garage. It was evident we could live in half of our space and still be satisfied.

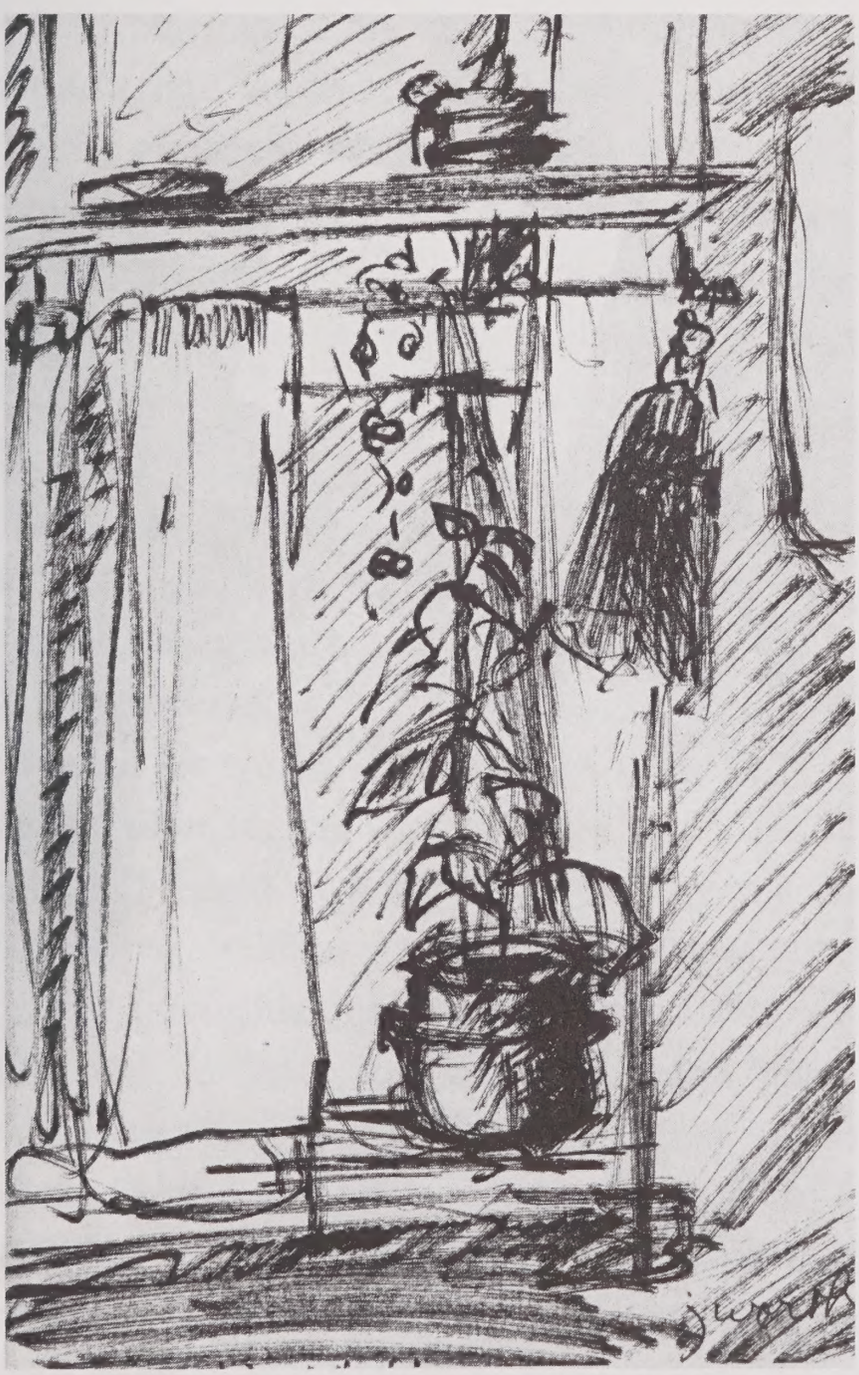
Perhaps satisfaction is the key to it all. At different times in my life, it seemed to take more to provide satisfaction; however, I have turned a corner in my life and find that I can be and am satisfied with less rather than more.

Having possessions brings responsibility, which can become burdensome. Attending to, maintaining, protecting, and upgrading possessions can be a full-time task. Things beget things. It isn't enough just to get a pair of shoes. One needs slacks and a top to match. Or a new piece of furniture seems out of place without a complete re-doing of the surroundings. In America, we have been programmed to think that more is better and I am convinced that at times in my life, more has been better. But not now. Things are different and my list of things to want is shorter than it has ever been. Most of what I want now is intangible and speaks to the heart.

I have a sixty-seven-year-old friend who said she would hate to die and make it necessary for her children to go through all the stuff she and

her husband have accumulated. I feel that way too. Things are only special because of the emotion and memories we attach to them. Probably, if we came to the heart of matters, a box full (different-size box for different people, of course!) of "treasures" would be about the right amount. The value of many things has long passed; and when I look at some things I have, I'm not sure why I kept them. Makes me think I could get along nicely without them.

Readiness is an important concept along the way of life's journey. My readiness is to get on with downsizing for myself. If I do it, I will be responsible as a steward of all that I have been given. I need to do it; and now, I want to do it.



Drawing by Joan Worth

Drawing by Joan Worth

The Greyhound

Gabrielle M. Thompson

Morning slammed in on the back of a hangover like a greyhound exploding from the gate of the seventh race determined to expend every ounce of its strength and win the day. Josh moved quickly from the bed, knowing there were only seconds until one end or the other erupted. With one fluid motion he dropped his boxers with his left hand (the only thing he ever slept in, having become accustomed to them on Mara-Lynn's insistence that sleeping raw was unseemly once Christy began to toddle) and grabbed the trash can to his chest with his right as his buttocks claimed the worn plastic seat. As he emptied his stomach of the previous evening's debauchery, his unfiltered Camels sat beside his Bic on the sink counter which was scarred by numerous earlier cousins left to smolder. He knew better than to light one; the gagging would begin even before his stomach could discern if this morning's dog of a hangover rated a full-fledged set of heaves. His normal "loose bowels" began their serenade as he tried to recall what day it was—a work day, or could he go back to bed and sleep this one off? Then he remembered. Not a work day—today he was flying from Los Angeles to Asheville to see Christy in her new home, with her new husband, her new practice, and her new belly—a family reunion with the only family he had other than the dogs at the track.

Josh had never been east of the Mississippi; a fifth-generation Californian, he'd taken his wife and child in their tiny trailer through the surrounding states on their vacation jaunts. The desert and sea were his haunts and, occasionally, the Sierra Nevada. Mara-Lynn's mother had been from North Carolina, but she'd escaped after the general textile strike of 1934 when her father and brothers had been shot in Burlington. She had hitched a ride west with the labor boss when it all blew apart, realizing her chances of ever again working in the state were next to nil. By the time they had reached the Pacific, Mary Beth was engaged to Roland Goldman. Mara-Lynn was her third, last, and late child—the name a salute to Mary Beth's Southern roots, yet pronounced like the hottest film star of the silver screen. Mara-Lynn grew to be a blonde bombshell with the same innocent quality of her namesake, but was happy with her lot in life as Josh's wife.

They'd met on the Sunset Strip, she in a Thunderbird, a graduation gift from her parents, and he in a Volkswagen van equipped with a bed in back and sunroof overhead. When they eloped to Vegas they sold the Thunderbird, using the money as a stash to keep them traveling in the van, enjoying the next sunset, the next lovemaking, the next joint. Mara-Lynn's family had disowned her, even her two older brothers whom she'd believed would understand. Josh and Mara-Lynn had lived in a commune in Monterey for a while, but the lifestyle finally had gotten old when Mara-Lynn discovered she was pregnant. Sleeping in the van, using the community outhouse, being cooped up during a full week of rain, nothing had dampened her spirits until she began to crave milk during her third month of pregnancy and the "elders" told her it wasn't affordable or allowed by their standard of vegetarianism—grains and greens were all she needed and would be allowed. Josh had fired up the van that night under cover of darkness, glad that they'd kept secret their emergency bankroll for just such a contingency.

Josh made it to the airport in the midst of a dreary gray rain, breaking a sweat from the combination of the exertion and the alcohol still coursing through his body as he carted his heavy bag in from the parking lot van. Not the worst hangover ever, but bad enough that he kicked himself for tying one on the night before. It was fear that made him do so—the fear that he needed to be on good behavior for the next week. Still, he brought his own gin in the suitcase, not wanting to have to ask Christy to take him to the store to buy liquor nor wanting her to know how much he drank. Once he checked the bag and got his gate pass, Josh headed for the hair of the dog, his first Bloody Mary of the day. His color and sense of well-being returned after the third.

As the plane lifted off over Los Angeles, Josh looked out the window at a city filled with noise: incessant car horns, engine revs, blasting stereos, pulsating sirens, airplanes, trains, sheriffs' helicopters, alarms, gunshots, and wall-to-wall screaming humanity. Christy's letters seduced with stories of her home on twenty acres far from town out Route 9, with bears, turkey, and deer being their most regular visitors, and stars so thick it looked as if the sky was carpeted. Josh couldn't imagine such a paradise. Christina had decided on Chapel Hill for law school, having graduated UCLA in the top of her class on full scholarship. By then, Mara-Lynn's

cancer had run the course of her body from breast to bone; however, she would not allow Josh to tell Christina, insisting she must go on with her life and not be burdened. Josh understood that Christy's choice of North Carolina was her way of paying homage to her mother's roots. Mary Beth's Southern heritage had passed down through the females of the line and her Southern drawl echoed in Mara-Lynn's occasional choice of phrase. Now that Christy had finished her law degree and settled in the South, her occasional telephone call reflected the slower pace of enunciation and tendency to voice more syllables than a Westerner would. Josh hadn't seen Christy since the day he put her on the plane for Chapel Hill. She'd finished law school and eloped the next week, marrying in Venice at St. Giorgios, gliding afterward by gondola to the Gritti Palace to experience a honeymoon straight from *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Afterward, she had explained on the telephone that his family was Southern, wealthy, and would never have understood her not having a clan to invite to a big church wedding. Brent, her husband, who worshiped the ground she walked on, offered her Italy as an out and she grabbed it, knowing Josh's feelings wouldn't be hurt since he'd chosen to elope with her mother when they began their life together. What she didn't say, but he fathomed, was that Mara-Lynn's death and her will calling for cremation without a funeral (which happened two months before Christy's graduation) had probably weighed heavily in his daughter's decision. He had followed his wife's wishes and lost them both.

Neither the flight's food nor its movie was worth the effort, but Josh subjected himself to both for lack of anything better to do. He wasn't a reader, as Mara-Lynn had been. He thought that was part of his problem; he had nothing to do since she was gone. He was so bloody bored with television; yet night after night he sat on the tired sofa in his apartment with a gin rocks and watched how low America had sunk in the realm of entertainment. It wasn't safe to go for a walk at night in his current neighborhood; besides it was noisy and dirty and his whole hope was just to escape all of that for a while. He'd lost the house and everything they'd owned to the medical bills—experimental bone marrow transplants—not that he begrudged a penny; he'd have given his life to save Mara-Lynn. Two more Bloody Marys on the plane allowed his exhaustion to catch him and sleep grabbed hold of him before the movie finished. His dreams were of

Christy: her anger, his remorse. It was based in the time before her pregnancy, before she'd forgiven him and asked him to come to visit. Although, in the dream Mara-Lynn was still alive and agreeing with Christina that it was Josh's fault, everything was Josh's fault. He awoke with a start and a snort, his head wedged back against the window, mouth open, and tears damp on his cheek. He rubbed his eyes as if they'd watered in his sleep and smiled sheepishly at his aisle mate as he asked to be let out. Splashing cold water on his face in the bathroom, he caught a glimpse of an old, gray-haired man, a haunted man.

His flight changed in Atlanta, and he rode an underground rail not unlike the above-ground Blue Line at home. He rode the Blue Line to work, cheaper and easier than driving. He kept his car for his frequent visits to the track. Gin and greyhounds were his only vices. And cigarettes, although he'd thrown the pack away at the airport vowing to quit this week since Christy told him on the telephone she did not allow smoking in her house.

On the shuttle flight north he again claimed the window, reveling in the quilt of colors that blanketed the terrain below. He had never seen such vibrancy: ruby reds, day-glow oranges, citrus yellows, and lime-to-forest greens embroidering hillsides bordered with fields of perfectly-edged fallow rows. He'd seen photographs depicting fall in the East: Maine, Vermont, places like that. Somehow, he'd never expected it to be that beautiful in the South. As the plane touched the ground, Josh was amazed at the smallness of the airport, even more so when he cleared the gate and Christy flew into his arms. She kissed him and hugged his neck, hard, as her tears leaked down the corners of her eyes. "Oh, Daddy. I can't believe it's you! We're finally together; you're here! I've missed you so much. Brent's out front, circling; we can grab your bag and leave rather than park."

She wasn't kidding. It was less than half an L.A. block to the baggage pick-up where Josh immediately found his suitcase and followed her the few steps to the curb where Brent waited in a new silver BMW. Brent popped the trunk and slid out from behind the wheel, introducing himself, shaking hands, and welcoming his father-in-law to western North Carolina.

Christina kept up a constant chatter, easing the introduction between the two men and detailing her life and all of its changes to her

father. Josh noticed Brent called her Christina not Christy, but she would always be Christy to him. He thought her round belly looked small for six months, remembering how much he and Mara-Lynn had loved every change her body went through during Christy's gestation. Josh almost lost them both at the birth and counted himself lucky for the years that followed. He'd been blessed with a wife he adored, every day of her life. Not many men could say that. It was pretty obvious from his words and glances as he drove that Brent felt the same way about Christy. That alone was worth Josh's trip.

By the time they reached the house, night had taken hold, completely swallowing the colors of the surrounding forest. The thing that impressed Josh the most when they stopped the car was the quiet. The quiet and the stars; Josh had never seen so many, or if he had he didn't recall clearly anymore. The house was cedar with lots of windows radiating a soft, golden light. The glow couldn't dampen the innumerable sparkling points filling the sky above. "This is just beautiful," Josh said. Tears blurred his vision as happiness for his little girl overwhelmed him. He needed a drink. Suddenly, a flash of gray burst from the back of the house, ran straight for the small group and leapt, delivering a wet kiss to each face in turn. Christy laughed and said, "Let me make the introductions, Dad. This is your namesake Josh. We got him from Greyhound Rescue. Now he's part of our family. Aren't you, Josh?" Christina rubbed the dog's ears and held his collar to curb his jumping enthusiasm.

Maybe a drink wasn't so important after all. Maybe he'd spend some time getting to know his namesake, and his new son-in-law. Maybe there was a chance life had more to offer than he could have ever imagined a few short days ago.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Play Day

Joanne S. Johnston

Against a cold winter's sun,
Perched on a high branch above the highway,
the regal hawk looks like a monarch
surveying his domain.
Dressed in his winter robe of white trimmed in red,
he sits on a throne
made visible
by nature's production
which insists that leaves fall away.
For miles, valleys unfold
kissed here and there with misty touches of fog.
For miles, peaks rise and fall
as if painted on canvas.
For miles, the clear sky sends an invitation
to come to the playground
where soaring on thermals is a minimal exercise.
In a starkly beautiful setting,
king hawk accepts the invitation.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Signs
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

Notes on Contributors

Kenet Adamson teaches in the English and Developmental Studies Departments.

Annie Cicale teaches art in the Division of Continuing Education.

Richard J. De Luca teaches Spanish in the Humanities Department.

Nancy Dillingham teaches in Adult Basic Skills. She is the author of two collections of short stories and poetry, *New Ground* (1998) and *The Ambiguity of Morning* (2001). Her newest collection is entitled *First Light.*

Joyce Dover is an Accounting Clerk in Student Accounts in the Business Office.

Julia Nunnally Duncan's short story collection *Blue Ridge Shadows* was published by Iris Press. She is currently working on her first novel and continues to write poems. She teaches English at McDowell Technical Community College.

Keith Flynn studied at Mars Hill College and the University of North Carolina-Asheville, winning the Sandburg Prize for poetry in 1985. He is lyricist and lead singer for the nationally acclaimed rock band, The Crystal Zoo. He has been awarded the Paumanok Prize and received two Pushcart nominations. Flynn is founder and managing editor of the *Asheville Poetry Review.*

Randee Goodstadt is Chair of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Department.

Will Hooper teaches physics in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Jim Hornaday teaches in the Mechanical Engineering Technology Department in the Division of Engineering and Applied Technology.

Joanne S. Johnston teaches in Adult Basic Skills.

Barry Landsberg retired as Director of Security; however, he continues to work as a part-time security officer.

Dara Llewellyn teaches in the English and Communications Department.

Debra Deitering Maddox teaches in the English and Communications Department.

Mike McCarthy is the Focused Industrial Training Coordinator in New and Expanding Industry in the Division of Continuing Education.

Celia Miles is the founding editor of *Victoria Press*. She is retired from the English and Communications Department. She is the author of *A Thyme for Love*, a romance novel, and *Mattie's Girl: An Appalachian Childhood*.

Fleta Monaghan teachers art in the Division of Continuing Education.

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Joan Worth teaches in Adult Basic Skills.

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Drawing by Joan Worth